

Tests

DVD PLAYERS

PORTABLE FRIDGES

MULCHER MOWERS

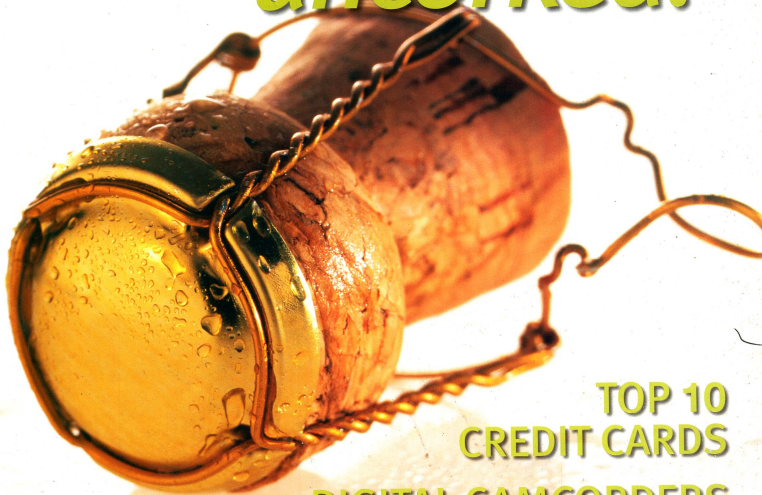
PREPACKED SALADS

JUICERS

CHOICE

Independent information for smart consumers

81 bubblies *uncorked!*



TOP 10
CREDIT CARDS

DIGITAL CAMCORDERS

Getting your money's worth

COMING SOON IN CHOICE



DISPOSABLE CAMERAS
DISHWASHERS
RUNNING SHOES
PACKAGED TUNA
REAL ESTATE AGENTS

this month online

www.choiceextra.com.au

This is the free website exclusive to CHOICE personal subscribers. Look out for this symbol  in magazine articles — it indicates there's extra info online.



FANCY SOME BUBBLY?

Check out our updated sparkling wine selector to help you easily choose the best drop for your Christmas celebrations from the 81 top-selling bubbles in our expert taste test. They're priced from \$5 right up to \$250. Go to www.choiceextra.com.au and click on Dec 03 under 'sparkling wine' in the index.

www.choice.com.au

CHOICE's public website, including content from *Computer CHOICE*, 'compare-a-product' features and news on consumer issues and our public campaigns.



CHOICE GUIDE TO BABY PRODUCTS

If there's a new-year delivery due in your family, you can't go past *The CHOICE Guide to Baby Products* to guide you through the maze of purchases you'll need to make. Here's your chance to preview the book, with Chapter 1 available free for a short time to CHOICE Online subscribers. Go to www.choice.com.au/baby for your sneak preview.

Personal CHOICE subscribers can have a discounted membership to www.choice.com.au for just \$7.50 per quarter (see page 50). If you currently have free access for 12 months, this will continue until that time is up, after which the discounted subscription will be available.



For your Christmas shopping...

As usual, we've tested lots of seasonal products for the December issue to make sure you get value for money in your Christmas shopping.

If you've been wondering whether to splash out on a DVD player, now could be the time to give yourself a Christmas treat — they've never been cheaper. We've tested 15, starting at just \$199, and found it's quite hard to make a mistake when buying one — just about all of them are good (page 23).

At the other extreme are digital camcorders: still around \$900 upwards, models are very different in what they offer in terms of performance and features. Our test of 20 (page 30) will help you make sure you get what you want at the best possible price.

There's not a lot of grass around in some parts of the country, but if there's enough to cut in your yard you might be thinking of investing in a mulcher mower this summer. Some models definitely give a better mulching result than others — see page 44.

And, by popular demand for the campers and off-roaders among our subscribers, for the first time we've tested portable fridges (page 39). They sound like a great idea, but we found lots of snags and plenty you need to think and know about when choosing one.

Last but not least, of course, is our test of 81 champagnes and sparkling wines. Take a look at the CHOICE Mixed Dozen (page 9) — there's good bubbly there to suit all budgets. *Santé* and merry Christmas from everyone at CHOICE.

Jane Mackenzie
Editor



Call 1300 360 655
and let us shop for you

All you need is the model name and number you want to buy, the price you want to beat, and your CHOICE subscriber number (from the mailing label with the magazine). CHOICE Shopper is available to personal subscribers only.

CONTENTS

December 2003

COVER STORY

8 81 bubbly uncorked

... in time for the Christmas festivities. Sparkling wines to suit all wallets.

Photo: Austral Images

REPORTS

15 The health fund hip-hop

How new government policies mean some people could pay more for prostheses such as an artificial hip.

16 Credit card buying guide

And the Top 10 cards to suit different payment patterns.

TESTS

20 Prepacked salad

Convenient but pricy — and watch out for the quality.

23 DVD players

Cheap enough for a Christmas treat.

26 Juicers

A good one doesn't come cheap.

30 Digital camcorders

Prices go from around \$900 way up — here's how to be sure you get what you want for your money.

39 Portable fridges

For campers and four-wheel drivers, by popular demand.

44 Mulcher mowers

The difference is in the mulching.

REGULARS

4 Choice Cuts

7 Your Letters

19 Food Bites: Custard for Christmas; survey on GM foods

22 Computing Choice: How to deal with spam

36 Consumer Bookshelf

48 Recalls and bans

50 About CHOICE

51 CHOICE index: Jan/Feb 2003 — December 2003

52 The Hard Word

8



www.CHOICEextra.com.au

Have you tried CHOICEextra yet? To use this free website for CHOICE magazine personal subscribers, you'll need to log in with your subscriber number, which is the eight-digit number above your name on the mailing label that comes with the magazine. We hope you like it.



Your next issue ...

... will be Jan/Feb 2004, which will be delivered in early February. You won't receive a magazine in January.

CORRECTION

SUPER FOR THE SOUL

CHOICE, October 2003

On page 26 we included PSS/CSS in a list of super funds that offer ethical/socially responsible investment options to their members. This is not the case. What PSS/CSS have is an investment governance program that addresses areas of social, environmental and corporate responsibility when choosing investments. There's no ethical option that members can choose — the program is focused on identifying and mitigating risks in those three areas in order to safeguard members' long-term interests.

Can you help?

CAR INSURANCE

We'd like to hear from people who've had a good or bad experience with a comprehensive car insurance claim.

- What happened?
 - Did you have a dispute with your insurance company regarding a claim? What company were you insured with? What was the outcome?
 - When did you make the claim? In addition we'd like to know:
 - What are the most important factors for you in a car insurance policy?
 - Can you suggest tips for car insurance in general or for getting a good deal on your premiums?
- Write to **Car insurance**, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204, or email carinsurance@choice.com.au by December 15. Please include a daytime phone number so that we can contact you if we have any questions. Thanks for your help.

THE ANSWER TO WINE STAINS?

OMO Onestep is promoted as the "better way to brilliant results". It's a tablet that you simply pop into your washing machine — no more powder all over your laundry. Another selling point is that it contains an

oxygen bleach. Hence the 'onestep' — there's no need for a soaker.

However, the drawback of tablet-form detergents is that you can't finely adjust the dosage to match the load, so you could be

wasting detergent (the suggested dose for a normal load is two tablets).

OMO Onestep is marketed by the manufacturer, Unilever, as part of its **OMO High Performance** product range. We wondered whether you'd notice any difference in wash performance between the OMO Onestep tablet and



ARTIST: SAUNDERS

Stepping your way to good health

Pedometers are small devices that record the number of steps you take, and are becoming increasingly popular. They're useful for monitoring exercise or just measuring daily activity. Many models provide additional features, including allowing you to measure distance travelled and energy used. But how reliable are they?

November **CHOICE Health Reader** reports on a US test of 10 models.

Findings included:

- None of the pedometers was accurate at counting steps when the wearer was walking slowly (3.2 km/h), but at normal and fast walking speeds (over 4.8 km/h) six were accurate to within 1%.
- All pedometers overestimated distance travelled at slow walking speeds and underestimated distance walked at faster speeds (probably because your step length varies according to your speed).
- Most pedometers were wildly inaccurate

at measuring energy expended at all walking speeds.

- Better-performing brands in this test were: **YAMAX Digiwalker SW-701**, **OMRON HJ-105**, **NEW LIFESTYLES NL-2000**, **KENZ Lifecorder** and **WALK4LIFE LS2525**. (The first two are widely available here; the rest may be harder to find, but you could try the internet.)

Researchers concluded that pedometers are best used to measure the number of steps taken in a day rather than the distance walked. They can promote awareness of physical activity patterns and help set realistic targets for better health. For example, the '10,000 Steps' (per day) programs that have popped up around the world have been shown to be effective at getting people more active, perhaps losing weight and reducing the risk of heart disease.

The Heart Foundation sells **YAMAX Digiwalker** pedometers (similar to the one recommended in this test) for \$49.95 (plus \$5 postage). For more about walking programs

its powder concentrate stablemate. So we tested the ability of these detergents to remove stains such as red wine and blood, and calculated how much each load cost.

We found that, overall, both products are equally good stain removers — but the tablet had a slight edge in removing the wine stain, perhaps reflecting the presence of the oxygen bleach in its formulation.

And yes, you guessed it — the convenience of the tablet comes at a price: approximately 10 cents per load more expensive than regular **OMO High Performance** concentrate.

For more information on laundry detergents, go to www.choiceextra.com.au and click on them in the index.



and using pedometers, phone 1300 36 27 87 or see its website, www.heartfoundation.com.au.

Also in this issue of **CHOICE Health Reader**:

■ Figures from the 2001 Australian National Health Survey found 16% of men and 17% of women are obese, up from 9% and 10% respectively in 1989–90. Another 42% of men and 25% of women are overweight. A good reason to start taking those 10,000 steps a day?

If you'd like to subscribe to **CHOICE Health Reader**, call 1800 069 552 or go to www.choice.com.au.



ANTHONY SAWERS

Looking for last-minute holiday deals?

With easier access to the internet and improved security for financial transactions, booking flights online is becoming more and more commonplace. Using an online travel agent can save you time and money, but there are pitfalls.

The following tips are reported in our sister magazine, **Computer CHOICE**.

- Advertised prices should include all taxes (GST, airport and others). Check the prices you're looking at do include them — on some websites they're not in the first price you see.
- When comparing prices, be sure to factor in the sales commission if there is one — some websites don't add it to your bill until the end part of the process.
- Check the conditions: we've come across an instance where a particular flight had appeared to be booked, but in fact hadn't been accepted by the airline because the routing — which the booking program allowed — was outside the rules. It wasn't until the passenger followed it up some time later that he discovered he had no flight.
- You might find you're offered flights at a price that doesn't apply during the dates you've specified. Again, check the conditions.
- Check that times and dates returned by the flight search make sense for all legs: for example, it may not take time zones into account, so you could find your second-leg flight leaves before your first flight arrives — or even leaves.
- There's more than one Sydney in the world — as a couple from Britain famously discovered last year when they spent their internet-booked holiday in Sydney, Nova Scotia, instead of its rather more prominent Australian namesake. Don't make a similar mistake!
- Many cities have more than one airport — make sure the one you're planning to use is convenient for you. And if you have to make a connection at a different airport, allow enough time to get there.
- Some flight searches provide details for flights near to as well as on your preferred time or date — so check carefully before you click the cheapest.
- Need help? If you get stuck anywhere in the process, or would simply feel more confident booking with a real person, most sites also offer personalised booking services and help lines. You may have to pay extra (5% or so) if you don't book it yourself, but it could be worth it for the peace of mind.

If you'd like to subscribe to **Computer CHOICE**, see page 49, call 1800 069 552 or go to www.choice.com.au.

CORRECTION

CHOICE CUTS: FISHER & PAYKEL CHOICE, November 2003

We apologise: one slip of the fingers and we gave you the wrong email address to contact Fisher & Paykel's customer care centre. The correct address is customer.care@fp.com.au.

UPDATE: Baldness drug — is it a cancer risk?

In the June 2003 issue of CHOICE we looked at the treatment of male pattern baldness, a condition that will affect around 50% of men by the age of 50. One of the potentially successful treatments discussed was the oral medication **PROPECIA**, containing 1 mg of the active ingredient finasteride.

This drug is also used for the relief of the symptoms of an enlarged prostate gland. For this condition, finasteride is marketed as **PROSCAR**, where it's given at a dose of 5 mg — five times that used for male pattern baldness.

The results of a recent randomised clinical trial, involving nearly 9000 men aged 55+ taking either finasteride or a placebo for seven years, were recently published in the prestigious *New England Journal of Medicine (NEJM)*. The study was designed to investigate the use of finasteride (at 5 mg/day) in preventing the development of prostate cancer in healthy men. It was concluded early when a key goal of the study was met: a clinically significant reduction in the prevalence of prostate cancer.

At this point, the incidence of prostate cancer was found to be reduced from 25.4% in the placebo group to 18.4% in the finasteride-treated group.

According to the scientist who led the study, "Finasteride is the first drug found to reduce the risk of prostate cancer. The drug worked for men at low risk of prostate cancer as well as those at high risk."

However, the lead scientist also added, "There is a cautionary note," as the study also showed that there was an *increased* risk (from 5.1% in the placebo group to 6.4% in the finasteride group) of developing more aggressive and dangerous forms of prostate cancer.

Commenting on the trial, the editorial in the same issue of the *NEJM* concluded that finasteride should therefore not be used as a prostate cancer preventative, and further advised that patients taking it for the management of enlarged prostate symptoms should be carefully monitored for prostate cancer development.

What do these findings mean for men who are taking finasteride at the lower dose for baldness? It's not clear: as the authors of the trial commented, "Although it's used by millions of men for these indications

[enlarged prostate and baldness], little is known about its long-term effects on the prostate."

This comment agrees with what we said in June — that further long-term studies seem warranted. In the meantime, if you're taking **PROSCAR** or **PROPECIA** and are concerned, or if you're in a high risk-group for prostate cancer (men with urinary symptoms or those over 50 with a family history), talk to your doctor.

AND A FURTHER UPDATE

One of the other options reviewed in our June article on baldness treatments was **ROGAINE**, containing the drug minoxidil. Since then, we've been informed that there are other generic brands on sale that contain minoxidil, **HAIR A-GAIN** and **MINOXIDIL**.

In a price snapshot comparison in Sydney in September we found the following prices for these products:

- **ROGAINE**: \$129–\$160 for three months' supply.
- **HAIR A-GAIN**: \$122–\$129 also for three months' supply (plus a bonus month's treatment).
- We couldn't find **MINOXIDIL** in pharmacies, but found it online for around \$50 for two months' supply.

Turn those old videos into DVDs

DVD recordable drives (otherwise known as DVD burners) that can read and write DVDs and CDs are rapidly dropping in price and could make a great Christmas present for any computer enthusiast. They're ideal for backing up large amounts of data, and if you have loads of home movies and old videos lying around, a DVD burner lets you convert them from VHS tapes to DVD.

CHOICE's sister publication, *Computer CHOICE*, recently tested eight DVD burners to see how easy they are to install and use and how they compare to cheaper CD burners. The results show there's not a lot of difference between backing up to CD or DVD, but if you want to transfer video footage to DVD, a DVD burner is worthwhile.

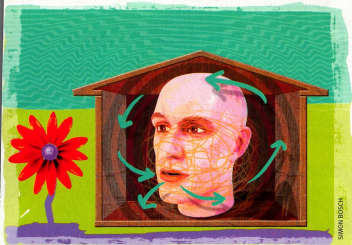
While the majority of the products tested are relatively easy to install and use, the **SONY DRU-510A** (\$499) and **PIONEER DVR-A06P** (\$499) outperform the rest when it comes to speed — an important consideration if you'll be burning lots of disks.

If you're a little wary about installing the drive yourself, consider the **SONY** — its installation instructions are comprehensive and easy to understand. The **PIONEER** matches the **SONY** for ease of use and speed, but was let down by poor installation instructions. If you have the drive professionally installed, however, this shouldn't be a problem.

For more information on DVD burners and how they differ from CD burners, plus the full results of the test, read the article in *Computer CHOICE*, Nov/Dec 2003. To subscribe, see page 49, call 1800 069 552 or go to www.choice.com.au.



UTR WYKONANY



Lead alert

Thank you for your article *Is your home making you sick?* (September 2003). As a result of reading it I was alerted to the dangers of lead paint.

As a tenant, I had always (and naively) assumed landlords had to provide a safe environment free of poisons. So when I moved into this new house two months ago and my cats became frequently sick, I didn't immediately consider lead poisoning.

Your article made me rethink. There was an old table with two benches in the courtyard — provided by the owner — with visibly flaking paint. I bought a lead testing kit and found it was full of lead. Since moving the furniture to the garage (away from

all animals) there has been no more sickness.

Well done to CHOICE for raising these issues, and thank you.

Bridget Hogg
Via internet

Old paint (pre-1970s) is a potential source of lead exposure, particularly to unwary renovators. If you think you might be at risk, test the paint with a kit before you start any renovations. For more information about how to deal with lead safely go to www.epa.nsw.gov.au/leadsafe, or contact the environment protection authority in your state.

Retrofit villages — the whole story?

I write to express my disappointment with your article

Beware retirement village rip-offs (September 2003). My complaint is not so much in what you did say (although it seemed to me it was planned to be as negative as possible) but more to the point what you didn't say. I always thought CHOICE aimed to give fair and balanced reports.

As a manager of a retirement village, I've seen numerous examples of positive life changes.

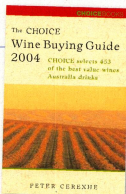
My question is: are you interested in doing a balanced article pointing out all aspects of retirement village living? Not only featuring the extreme end of the financial obligations but the whole picture.

I could fill pages of your magazine with positive responses from residents and families.

Bill Moore
Rosebank Retirement Village

Our article was about the financial aspects of taking up residence in a retirement village. It wasn't intended also to cover retirement lifestyle options.

We're sure there are many excellent villages and happy residents. However, potential residents need to be very aware of the financial implications before committing themselves to village life.



THUMBS UP!



■ Miss J Bryant of Naremburn, NSW, awards a thumbs-up to Mirabella International. After her kitchen light failed she put in a **MIRABELLA** bulb, which immediately blew. Thinking she had an electrical problem she called an electrician, who successfully solved the problem by replacing the bulb with another new one. When she complained to **MIRABELLA** about the quality of its bulbs it reimbursed her for the cost of the electrician's service call.

More CHOICE shopper satisfaction

I'd just like to say a big 'thank you' to CHOICE Shopper. I was after a digital camera and after asking CHOICE Shopper, I got what I wanted for \$100 cheaper than any quote I'd received before.

Good on you, keep up the good work. I will definitely use CHOICE shopper again.

John Alexander
Via internet

CHOICE Shopper is a service we provide to personal CHOICE subscribers and CHOICE Online members. You can save on just about any product that costs more than \$100 (including cars over \$10,000); 85–90% of the time CHOICE Shopper will beat your best price by around 8%.

All you need is the brand and model number you want to buy, the price you want to beat, and your CHOICE subscriber number (from the mailing label with the magazine).

When you're ready to buy, call CHOICE Shopper on 1300 360 655 (9 am to 5 pm, Monday to Friday, wherever you are in Australia).

LETTER OF THE MONTH

We want to hear from you — your experiences help our research and often let other readers know about scams and rip-offs. Positive outcomes you've had to a complaint you took to a manufacturer, retailer, importer or tradesperson interest us, too. Address these letters to *Thumbs Up* at the address on page 50.

To thank you for writing to us, *Your Letters* awards a prize of a CHOICE book to the 'Letter of the month'. This month's winner, Bridget Hogg, receives the *CHOICE Wine Buying Guide 2004*, or any other book of her choice from Consumer Bookshelf, pages 36–38.

We're sorry we don't have the resources to answer all your letters personally, and in the magazine we may edit them or print only an extract. See page 50 for how to reach us.



Festive fizz

Good wine for all budgets.

IN A NUTSHELL

■ Six wine experts tasted and rated 81 sparkling wines and champagnes.

■ The best of the super-premium champagnes costs a small fortune, but quite a few less expensive ones also impressed the experts — see The CHOICE Mixed Dozen, far right.

The end-of-year festivities and summer holidays are just around the corner. For many it's also the season to enjoy a special glass of sparkling wine to help both celebrations and relaxation. So for this year's wine test we bought 81 of the most popular bubbly available in Australia and asked six experts (four winemakers, a consultant and a retailer) to give us their verdict.

The wines cover all tastes — crisp and zingy, rich and full-bodied, spicy, fruity and sweet. The experts' scores and tasting notes should help you find the right bottle, no matter whether you're after an inexpensive, cool and refreshing drop of bubbly to enjoy at a party, 'the real thing' for a special occasion, or a sparkling red to savour with food.

But you'll probably be just as much guided by price when choosing a bottle, so to make your choice easier we split the 81 bottles into five groups: less than \$12, between \$12 and \$20, between \$20 and \$50, more than \$50 and sparkling reds.

Overall, this year's sparkling wine and champagne tasting held no big surprises, but no disappointments either. More than half the wines in the test (45) received medal-equivalent scores. (At wine shows, a wine that scores 18.5 points or more out of 20 is awarded a gold medal, 17–18.4 points a silver and 15.5–16.9 points a bronze medal.) Only three wines (all in the lowest price bracket) received low scores. A score of 14 to 15 generally indicates the wine's OK, but nothing special — clean, safe and commercial.

BUDGET CHOICES

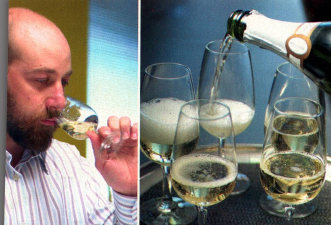
Perhaps not surprisingly, the lowest price bracket (less than \$12) contained the largest number of bottles (30). At this price point you won't get any gold medal wines, but six had bronze medal-equivalent scores. For the traditional CHOICE Mixed Dozen (far right) we chose the top two.

At \$9, the LINDEMANS Bin 25 Brut Cuvée 2002 is seriously good value. It's an unusual wine with interesting flavours and some true sparkling wine balance, according to the expert tasters. And our lay panel — a group of amateur wine lovers who tasted some of the wines the experts rated highly, poorly or couldn't agree upon — fully agreed with the experts' verdict, also scoring this one highest in this price bracket. (We held a lay tasting to see how much agreement there is between expert and amateur taste.)

If you're looking for a completely different style of wine — more spumante-like, sweet and fruity — the OMNI Blue is for you. It received the equal highest score in this price bracket and elicited expert tasters' comments such as: "a good breakfast wine" or "taste of springtime". With its highly aromatic nose and sweet and fruity palate, it stood out from the pack. But our lay panel couldn't quite warm to it, with most commenting that it was too sweet for their liking.

THE MORE YOU PAY ...

... the better the wines. If you're prepared to pay just a little more for your bottle of fizz, your chances of getting a good-quality wine that won't disappoint you increase. In this bracket of wines selling for \$12–\$20,



THE CHOICE MIXED DOZEN

Below is our traditional CHOICE Mixed Dozen — a selection of top sparkling wines from each price bracket. This time we've picked two from the lowest price bracket, four from the popular price range between \$12 and \$20, four premium Australian sparkling wines up to \$50, as well as the top-scoring sparkling red — and, if only the best will do, the highest-scoring champagne in the test.



TAMARA GRAHAM

eight out of 17 received a bronze medal-equivalent score and one, the **YELLOWGLEN Vintage Crémant 2001**, a silver. This is a fresh, well-structured wine that was rated highly by both experts and the lay panel alike. It has a toasty, fruity palate and, at \$14.45, is very good value.

In this price bracket you'll also find three *mixed emotions*: wines that some expert tasters rated highly and some didn't. When their individual scores varied too greatly, we haven't averaged them to get a score but listed them separately showing the score range. Our lay panel wasn't too impressed with them, but your taste might match the experts who rated them highly.

Spend more than \$20 and you're getting into genuinely good fizz. All 10 wines in our test that cost \$20–\$50 received a medal-equivalent score — no fizzier among them. This price bracket had primarily Australian sparkling wines plus two from New Zealand. The top-scoring **SIR JAMES Vintage Pinot Noir Chardonnay 1999** impressed both experts and amateurs and, at \$22.50, it's one of the cheapest in this class.

Our thanks to the experts

From left to right, above:

Zar Brooks, wine consultant.

Louella McPhan, winemaker, Seppelt Great Western.

Jeremy Stockman, wine retailer, Liquorland/Vintage Cellars.

Neville Rowe, winemaker, Domaine Chandon.

Mark Richardson, winemaker, Tyrell's Vineyards.

Ed Carr, winemaker, BRL Hardy.

Less than \$12		Price
\$5	LINDEMANS Bin 25 Brut Cuvée 2002	\$9.00
	OMNI Blue	\$11.50
Between \$12 and \$20		
\$5	YELLOWGLEN Vintage Crémant 2001	\$14.45
\$5	GRANT BURGE Brut Pinot Noir Chardonnay	\$15.00
\$5	YELLOWGLEN Vintage Pinot Noir Chardonnay 2001	\$14.45
	SIR JAMES Cuvée Brut Pinot Noir Chardonnay	\$16.00
Between \$20 and \$50		
\$5	SIR JAMES Vintage Pinot Noir Chardonnay 1999	\$22.50
	CROSER Petaluma 2000	\$38.50
\$5	JANISZ Premium Non Vintage Cuvée	\$26.00
More than \$50		
	MOËT & CHANDON DOM PÉRIGNON Cuvée Champagne 1995	\$250.00
\$5	ARRAS Chardonnay Pinot Noir 1998	around \$50 *
Sparkling red		
	SEPPelt Original Sparkling Shiraz 1999	\$19.00

Prices are what we paid in August/September 2003, rounded to the nearest five cents. Shop around for the best deal, and watch out for specials.

\$5 denotes good value in this price bracket.

* At the time of our test we had problems finding this latest vintage in shops; it should be easily available now. Previous vintages sold for around \$50–\$56.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

For more information about champagne and sparkling wine, go to www.choiceextra.com.au and click on Dec 03 under 'sparkling wine and champagne' in the index. You'll find our interactive wine selector plus more information on the traditional champagne-making *méthode champenoise* and other sparkling wine methods, vintage, non-vintage and recently disgorged dates, cork contamination, sparkling wine terms and hints on how to get the best from a bottle of sparkling wine.



Australian winemakers seem to concentrate their efforts on sparkling wines costing around \$30 or less, rather than on more expensive super-premium drops. Perhaps not surprising, considering you'll probably want 'the real thing' if you're parting with more than \$50. And in fact genuine champagne does dominate the top end of the market. Of the 13 bottles in the more than \$50 price bracket, only one wasn't champagne — but the **ARRAS Chardonnay Pinot Noir 1998** certainly proved its place among the best with a gold-medal score. Our lay panel wasn't quite as impressed as the experts, but at around the \$50 mark this Australian sparkling wine is definitely worth a try — it could be a real alternative for the champagne lover.

Five champagnes also received gold medal-equivalent scores. In our *Mixed Dozen* we've included the top-scoring **MOËT & CHANDON DOM PÉRIGNON Cuvée Champagne 1995**. It's the outstanding sensation in the test, liked best by both experts and lay panel. But at \$250, it's also the most

expensive. So try it if you can spare the money — it's at its best right now. But there are quite a few other champagnes that cost much less and still received excellent scores.

SPARKLING REDS

We also included in the test 11 sparkling reds, whose popularity is steadily on the rise. They're often made from shiraz grapes, which can produce a soft, rich wine full of flavours and without too much tannin. If you haven't tried one before, don't assume these wines are just red versions of the familiar sparkling wines. They're big, bold, tangy and tasty, and are well teamed with food.

Of the 11 sparkling reds in our test, eight received medal-equivalent scores. Both experts and the lay panel liked the top-scoring **SEPPELT Original Sparkling Shiraz 1999** best, but at \$19 it's also one of the most expensive in the bracket. **BANROCK STATION The Reserve Sparkling Shiraz** is a little less refined, but a cheaper alternative.

The jargon decoded

Puzzled by the jargon? This list should help you make sense of the tasting notes in the table, pages 12–14.

Aldehyde: A volatile substance with a characteristic nutty or sherry-like aroma. It's present in most wines, but too much of it produces an unpleasant chemical taste or smell.

Bead: The bubbles: the smaller the better. The head of bubbles on top and the sensation they produce is called *mousse*.

Bready/toasty/yeasty: A pleasant yeast smell or taste typical of champagne.

Cloying: Excessively sweet, without sufficient acid balance.

Coarse: Shows undesirable attributes arising from, for example, oxidation, soluble solids or excessive tannin.

Cuvée: The juice extracted from the first pressing of the grapes, or a blend of wines obtained after the first fermentation.

Developed: Showing signs of aging in the bottle, usually but not always beneficial.

Dusty: A flavour sensation, usually due to oak.

Earthy: A taste sensation with mineral characteristics.

Extractive: The wine has become *coarse*.

Estery: Strong fruity aromas derived from the interaction of alcohol with grape acids.

Foxy: Unpleasantly sweet, *cloying* aroma.

Lactic acid: A milky and soft acid; in faulty wines it can impart a slightly sickly sour milk aroma.

Leathery: Slightly sour smell or taste, almost certainly deriving from small amounts of *mercaptan*. Not necessarily unpleasant.

Lifted: A touch of *volatility* that can benefit the wine.



ANTHONY SAWERS/IANESSA MARSHALL/CHRISTIAN WILSON



What's milk doing in my wine?

If you've wondered lately why your wine label now lists milk, fish or egg products, rest assured that it's no new additive fad. Winemakers have long been using such substances as fining agents to help clarify their wines. However, only since late last year have they had to declare some of these on the wine label if they're potential allergens and traces remain in the final product.

'Fining' a wine simply means adding certain substances to it to help remove tannins and harsh compounds. Typical fining agents are gelatin, isinglass (a fish protein), skim milk, egg white, casein (a milk protein) or bentonite (a very fine clay). Added to wine they attract the sediment so it settles to the bottom, where it's removed before bottling.

Of the sparkling wines in this test, just over a quarter had some fining agents listed, primarily milk products. Winemakers have until the end of 2004 to update their labels.

Malolactic fermentation (malo): A winemaking process where bacteria convert malic into lactic acid to give the wine extra softness and complexity.

Meaty: Raw meat smell that can be attractive in some wine styles.

Mercaptan: An unattractive aroma of burnt rubber, old cabbage, asparagus or garlic, derived from sulphur compounds.

Oak/oaky: A smell and taste usually derived from maturation in an oak barrel.

Oxidised: Brownish colour and dullness of flavour and aroma are signs of excessive exposure to air: the wine's going off. However, slight oxidation can be beneficial. When the wine hasn't benefited from oxidation, it gets **reduced/reductive** characters to its nose and has little fruit aroma left.

Pencil shavings: Bitter and raw oak aroma or flavour.

Phenolic: Excessive phenols (chemical compounds from grape skins and pips) indicative of a winemaking fault.

Stalky: Exposure to stalks during fermentation leaves a bitter character in the wine.

Sulphide: Hydrogen sulphide (rotten-egg smell) or mercaptan (burnt rubber) characteristics. Very undesirable.

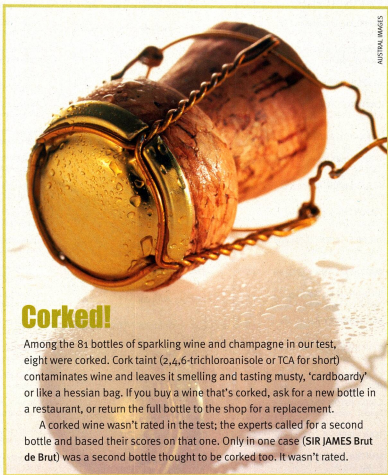
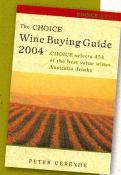
Tannin (tannic acid): Grape pips, skins and stalks (as well as wooden casks) naturally contain tannin, which acts as a preservative and imparts dryness to the finish.

Volatile acids: These are present in all wine and give it a desirable lift or 'kick'.

Volatile acidity (VA): Spoilt by too much acetic acid, which turns wine vinegary.

THE CHOICE WINE BUYING GUIDE 2004

Seasoned wineophiles and novices alike will appreciate *The CHOICE Wine Buying Guide 2004*, the result of our biggest wine test ever. Now in its third year, the guide has established itself as a totally independent and reliable guide to over 450 of the most popular and best-value wines available in Australia. It includes a score and tasters' notes for each wine, a special colour section with recommended wines and chapters on general wine information. Available from December 8 and still just \$30! See page 36 to order it.



Corked!

Among the 81 bottles of sparkling wine and champagne in our test, eight were corked. Cork taint (2,4,6-trichloroanisole or TCA for short) contaminates wine and leaves it smelling and tasting musty, 'cardboardy' or like a hessian bag. If you buy a wine that's corked, ask for a new bottle in a restaurant, or return the full bottle to the shop for a replacement.

A corked wine wasn't rated in the test; the experts called for a second bottle and based their scores on that one. Only in one case (**SIR JAMES BRUT de Brut**) was a second bottle thought to be corked too. It wasn't rated.

BUYING FIZZ

Sparkling wine and champagne are best when released and generally don't improve with age. So buy it when you're ready to drink it. If you're spending big on champagne, it's particularly important to buy from a reputable retailer who can be seen to have a high stock turnover and doesn't just keep the odd bottle of expensive fizz on the shelf 'for show', so to speak. Retailers should rotate their stock regularly and keep it under favourable conditions — away from the sun, other heat sources and fluorescent lights.

TEST: Champagne & sparkling wine

Brand	1 Score out of 20	2 Price paid (\$)	Origin	Alcohol (%)	3 Additives	4 Tasting notes
UP TO \$12 (in rank order)						
LINDEMANS Bin 25 Brut Cuvée 2002	16	9.00	Australia	12	220	Bright golden straw colour; honey mead nose with some ripe fruit and floral notes; creamy honeyed yeast, fruit flavours on a full and dry palate — unusual, with some true sparkling wine complexity.
OMNI Blue	16	11.50	Australia	9	ns	Pale straw colour, fine bead; highly aromatic nose with spicy, sultana and frontignac/muscato notes; sweet, fruity palate, spumante-like — for those who appreciate a well-handled sweet sparkling wine.
ANGAS Brut Pinot Noir Chardonnay Premium Cuvée	15.5	10.00	Australia	12	300, 220	Golden straw colour with a green tinge and little mousse; tart, estery aromas on a subdued nose; simple, fresh, dry palate — some acid hardness and clean vinous flavour.
DEAKIN ESTATE Brut	15.5	10.70	Australia	12.5	300, 220	Bright yellow/green colour with a fine mousse; developed yeast/toast aromas; lively, fresh, lifted acid palate, lemon sherbet, pear and smoky/toasty flavours — a big, ripe chardonnay style.
OMNI NV	15.5	11.00	Australia	12	220	Medium straw/brownish colour with a fine mousse; nutty, toasty aromas with a hint of a Playdough, confectionery nose; long palate with strong acid — a bigger, fuller style with strong acid.
YELLOWGLEN Yellow	15.5	12.00	Australia	11	220	Pale straw colour with green highlights and a foamy mousse; fresh and fruity aromas of lemon, peach and orange blossom; fresh, crisp citrus flavours, a little sweet-and-sour — simple, clean style.
KILLAWARRA Brut	15	9.50	Australia	11.5	220	Pale straw colour with slight copper hue and a fine bead; aromas of candied fruits with a light doughy character; simple, sweet palate with quince and pear flavours — creamy, soft, some length.
MINCHINBURY Brut Private Cuvée	15	6.50	Australia	11.5	220	Light to medium straw colour with persistent mousse; grapy, tropical fruit aromas with a hint of biscuit/candlewax showing through; fresh and fruity palate — simple style, a little drier.
QUEEN ADELAIDE Brut	15	7.50	Australia	11.5	220	Very pale straw colour with fine, light bead; simple fruit aromas of sultana, apple and green pear — a fresh and lively style without a lot of apparent fruit on the palate.
SEPPEL Great Western Brut Reserve	15	7.50	Australia	11.5	220	Bright straw colour with a strong bead; toasty characters on a fresh, more complex nose of apricot and peach; harder acid at first moving to a softer finish — an interesting, complex style at this price.
SEPPEL Great Western Imperial Reserve	15	7.50	Australia	11.5	220	Bright straw colour with a strong mousse; hints of stone fruit and spiced apple on a not very potent nose; simple, fresh and fruity palate with fair acid — not too sweet.
BLUES POINT Brut Reserve	14.5	11.00	Australia	11.5	220	Pale lemon colour, fine, persistent bead and mousse; aromatic, fruity style with floral, eggy and lime aromas and a rubbery note; soft palate with a sweet-and-sour quality — simple; obvious sweetness.
CARRINGTON Vintage Brut Special Cuvée 2002	14.5	5.00	Australia	12	220	Pale yellow/green colour, a touch flat; simple aromas of cosmetics and fruit; light and simple, clean, fresh palate — a little drier on the finish.
COCKATOO RIDGE NV Brut	14.5	10.95	Australia	11.5	300, 220	Medium straw colour with a bronze tint and little mousse; bread/toast aromas over citrus and white peaches carried over to the palate — yeasty and rich with a slightly tannin dry finish.
EAGLEHAWK Sparkling Chardonnay	14.5	7.95	Australia	10.5	220	Medium straw/gold colour with a fair degree of mousse; the bread/honey bottle-aged characters on the nose carried over to the palate — simple, somewhat developed, middle-of-the-road.
GLASS MOUNTAIN Classic Brut	14.5	9.50	Australia	12	220	Green/gold colour with intense, fine mousse; spicy nose with sweet, cooked apple character and a hint of brine; sweet palate — simple, fruity and sweet.
HARDYS Regional Reserve Classic	14.5	7.50	Australia	11	220	Green/gold colour with little bead or mousse; floral/muscato nose with grapefruit and orange aromas; pleasant flavours of orange and confectionery — aromatic, sweet style with a soft, lingering finish.
JACOB'S CREEK Chardonnay Pinot Noir Brut Cuvée	14.5	11.70	Australia	12	220	Straw/green colour with a fine bead; ripe fruit aromas with an odd sweaty/medicinal note; slightly coarse palate with an aged character — an older Aussie style.
MATTHEW LANG Brut Cuvée	14.5	5.50	Australia	11.5	220	Pale straw colour and good mousse; rose petal, floral and apple aromas; some crisp acid with some fruit and dough flavours — a simple, sweet and slightly acidic style.
MCGUIGAN The Black Label Sparkling Chardonnay 2000	14.5	11.00	Australia	13	220	Yellow/gold colour; yeasty nose with secondary characters of nut, apricot, soy sauce; developed, slightly savoury/salty and dry palate — unusual.
MINCHINBURY Fine Private Cuvée	14.5	6.50	Australia	11.5	220	Salmon pink colour with a brown onion tint and fine mousse; musk stick and cherry/stewed rhubarb aromas; lolly flavours — strawberry and earthy characters covered by sweetness.
MINCHINBURY Private Cuvée Brut de Brut	14.5	6.50	Australia	11.5	220	Medium straw colour with a green tint; floral nose with lifted aromatics of peach and lychee; sweet, grapy flavour reminiscent of moscato wines — full, soft and rounded.
CARRINGTON Blush Special Cuvée NV	14	6.60	Australia	11.5	220	Vibrant pink lolly colour with a fair bead; unusually foxy/fishy, caramel confectionery nose; simple raspberry and stone fruit palate — finish a little short and flat.
CARRINGTON Brut Reserve Special Cuvée NV	14	6.60	Australia	11.5	220	Pale yellow/green colour with little mousse; clean, spicy/tropical aromas; some fruit flavour — slightly hard acid palate.
JEAN PIERRE & CO Classique	14	4.95	Australia	11	220, 224, 300	Golden straw colour with a little mousse; aged herbal and simple fruit, confectionery and smoked meat aromas; broad, cloyingly sweet — lacking freshness on the palate.
MINCHINBURY White Seal Private Cuvée	14	6.50	Australia	11.5	220	Green-and-gold colour with a persistent mousse; pear, fig, orange and peach aromas; simple and fruity palate — sweet finish.
SEAVIEW Grande Cuvée 2001	14	8.50	Australia	11.5	220	Deep straw gold colour with a toffee tint and medium-level fizz; stale/aged characters of honey and bread on the nose; spicy fruit flavours with some acid dryness — aromatic, creamy, richer style.
SEAVIEW Brut de Brut 2002	13.5	9.00	Australia	11.5	220	Golden straw colour developing a brown tinge with a fair amount of fizz; stewed/sweaty nose with a medicinal/fruit cocktail edge; fuller style palate — coarse, extracted and phenolic.
WYNDHAM ESTATE S222 Sparkling Chardonnay 2002	13.5	7.95	Australia	12	220	Medium yellow/gold colour with a small amount of mousse; aromas of dried spices and tobacco and rubbery/meaty developed notes; simple fruit palate — showing some hardness.
SEAVIEW Brut 2002	13	9.00	Australia	11.5	220	Pale yellow colour with good mousse; clove aromas and a certain meaty quality with an odd plastic hint; cloves and medicinal/plastic flavours — solid and complex palate.
BETWEEN \$12 AND \$20 (in rank order)						
YELLOWGLEN Vintage Crémant 2001	17	14.45	Australia	11.5	220	Yellow colour with brown onion tint, fine bead, fair mousse; toasty nose with some lactic and cooked vegetable notes; fruity, yeasty palate, rounded and sweet — a fresh, well-structured wine.

Brand	1 Score out of 20	2 Price paid (\$)	Origin	Alcohol (%)	3 Additives	4 Tasting notes
GRANT BURGE Brut Pinot Noir Chardonnay	16.5	15.00	Australia	12	220	Golden straw colour with hints of brown, fine bead but little mousse; developed apricot, honey, nutty/aldehydic and pinot aromas; complex palate with slightly drying tannins — rich and full bodied.
YELLOWGLEN Vintage Pinot Noir Chardonnay 2001	16.5	14.45	Australia	11	220	Pale gold colour with an onion skin/copper hue and a strong, persistent mousse; spicy pinot characters with toast/bread and rubbery aromas; crisp, zingy lemon flavour — spicy, zingy.
SIR JAMES Cuvée Brut Pinot Noir Chardonnay	16	16.00	Australia	12	ns	Pale straw colour with medium bead and mousse; yeasty, developed characters on the nose with some fruit notes; some spicy pinot fruit flavour with acid tartness — creamy, soft and rounded.
ANDREW GARRETT Pinot Noir Chardonnay	15.5	15.00	Australia	11.5	220	Straw colour with pink tinge, a fine mousse; pinot characters, strawberry, apple, quince and biscuit aromas; pinot and nutty/aldehydic flavours — a very dry and firm, fruit-driven wine.
BROWN BROTHERS King Valley PNC	15.5	18.50	Australia	12	224	Pale lemon/straw colour with good fizz; dull, dusty nose with some nut, citrus and yeasty notes; creamy texture, strong, crisp fruit, finish a little tough — nicely structured palate.
RICHMOND GROVE Chardonnay Pinot Noir	15.5	15.65	Australia	12	220	Straw colour with green highlights and a fair mousse; spicy, meaty/rubbery and floral aromas with a hint of hay; creamy texture, rich fruit flavour and a nice, easy balance — sweet without being simple.
TALTARNI Brut 2000	15.5	18.00	Australia	13	220	Deep straw yellow with a brown tint, good bead and mousse; strong apple, butter/toast and aged fruit aromas; nutty, fruit-driven palate, drying finish — some liked it, others found it lacked freshness.
WOLF BLASS Vintage Pinot Noir Chardonnay 2000	15.5	18.00	Australia	11.5	300, 220	Straw colour with a brown onion tint and larger bead and little mousse; spicy, bread/yeasty nose with a rubbery/smoky note; lemony, ripe apple flavour — balanced and dry.
REDBANK Emily Pinot Noir Chardonnay Brut Cuvée	15	14.00	Australia	12	300, 220	Straw-gold colour with fine bead but little mousse; salty/fishy, rubbery, dusty aromas; simple and fruity, with a certain alcohol thickness, finishing short — rich, soft and rounded.
SEPPELT Fleur de Lys Pinot Noir Chardonnay	15	13.50	Australia	12.5	220	Deep straw colour with a golden tint and fine bead; creamy, aged honey/toast nose; aldehydic and oak quality on the palate — a bigger style of medium length.
WOLF BLASS Non Vintage Chardonnay Pinot Noir	15	13.25	Australia	10.5	220	Pale green/lemon colour, strong bead and mousse; fresh, fruity nose of biscuit/dough/candlewax over stone fruit and apple; creamy, biscuity palate, finishing short — simple, fruity and soft.
ORLANDO Trilogy PNC Pinot Meunier Cuvée Brut	14.5	14.90	Australia	12.5	220	Pale yellow/green colour, fine bead but little mousse; dusty, meaty/soy sauce, aldehydic and aged fruit aromas with a floral note; nutty/aldehydic and aged fruit flavours — thick and oily palate.
YELLOWGLEN Pink	14	12.75	Australia	11	220	Fairy-floss pink colour and persistent mousse; lifted aromas of strawberry and confectionery, smokiness and caramel fruit; simple and light confectionery fruit flavours — an easy-drinking style.
MIXED EMOTIONS (in alphabetical order)						
GRANDIN Brut	14.5–17	15.00	France	11.5	300, 220	Straw colour, green highlights, fine bead, no real mousse; bread, marzipan and burnt rubber aromas; spicy notes on a rich palate, honey and apple flavours — very different from the Australian product.
HENKELL Trocken Dry-Sec	14.5–17	16.50	Germany	11.5	220	Lighter straw colour with green highlights; broad toasty, almond and rubber/pencil shavings aromas; marzipan and floral fruit flavours, finishing short and slightly bitter — big, soft style.
ROSEMOUNT V Chardonnay Pinot Noir	13.5–17	13.00	Australia	12.5	220	Medium straw colour with a brown tint and a light mousse; yeasty, confectionery/caramel nose with some nutty/aldehydic aromas; dry, firm palate, complex and sweet — a bigger style.
BETWEEN \$20 AND \$50 (in rank order)						
SIR JAMES Vintage Pinot Noir Chardonnay 1999	18	22.50	Australia	12.5	ns	Pale straw colour, smoky, rubbery sulphide (reductive) nose, which blew off to leave a complex set of toasty aromas; complex, well-structured palate, strong acid, rich flavours — fresh, long, elegant.
CROSER Petaluma 2000	17	38.50	Australia	12.5	220	Yellow/green colour, fine bead, good mousse; apple seed, strawberry, nutty/aldehydic, spicy aromas; sweet apple and bread/yeast aromas, well-balanced palate, moderate length — a big style.
JANSZ Premium Non Vintage Cuvée	17	26.00	Australia	12	220	Pale straw colour with green highlights and a persistent mousse; sweet pastry, smoky/toasty and greener, spicy fruit aromas; youthful, spicy and crisp fruit flavours — a strong acid balance.
CHANDON Vintage Brut 1999	16.5	35.00	Australia	12.5	220	Pale straw colour, fine mousse; pinot spice complexity on the nose with buttery toast and ripe citrus aromas; moderate citrus flavour, a little green — soft palate with a racy, fresh acid balance.
DEUTZ Marlborough Cuvée Brut	16.5	23.00	NZ	12	300, 220	Pale straw colour with good, persistent mousse; white pepper, spicy fruit and musk/bacon/smoky aromas; green fruit and citrus flavours — a fresh acid lift and fair length on the finish.
SEPPELT Salingir 2000	16.5	27.00	Australia	12.5	220	Medium gold colour with an onion brown hue; smoky honey/toast and apple seed and developed, aldehydic aromas; toast/honey flavours starting to dry out — creamy palate, intense flavours.
BLUE PYRENEES Vintage Brut 1999	16	25.00	Australia	12	300, 220	Bright golden straw colour with strong mousse; clean citrus and spicy/earthy aromas with a slightly eggy/milk powder note; lemon sorbet flavour — strongly acidic palate.
CHANDON Cuvée Riche	16	35.00	Australia	12.5	220	Pale orange colour, fine bead; creamy pinot nose, complex strawberry, yeasty and earthy aromas; soft palate with nice acid and an appealing dry finish — a sweeter style, luscious, clean and fresh.
YALUMBA 'D' Cuvée 1998	16	35.30	Australia	12.5	220	Pale straw/yellow, fine bead and little mousse; complex crème anglais and spicy/soy sauce/brine aromas; some greener fruit flavour, hard acid — a crisp structure in a slightly sweet wine.
PELORUS Vintage 1998	15.5	33.30	NZ	13	220	Golden colour with a dark copper tint, moderate fizz; smoky yeast, mushroom, aldehydic and licorice notes; cooked, aged wine, white pepper and green/herbal flavours — some complexity and length.
MORE THAN \$50 (in rank order)						
MOËT & CHANDON DOM PÉRIGNON Cuvée 1995	19	250.00	France	12.5	220	Gold colour with greenish hue, persistent mousse, fine bead; complex lanolin and spicy marmalade aromas; soft, creamy palate with complex fruit and yeast flavours — in spectacular form: try it now.
ARRAS Chardonnay Pinot Noir 1998	18.5	50.00 (A)	Australia	12	ns	Pale lemon colour, fine mousse; complex nose with aromas of young, fresh fruit with toasty/yeast and confectionery/plastic note; rich, full palate, lemon flavour, strong acid — dry finish, great length.
MOËT & CHANDON Champagne Vintage 1996	18.5	94.00	France	12.5	220	Medium gold colour, persistent mousse; classic champagne aromas of buttery toast, crème brûlée and Vegemite; fine, long palate, persistent fruit flavours, good acid — a tight style, crisp and refined.
PIPER-HEIDSIECK Brut Champagne	18.5	61.10	France	12	300, 220	Pale lemon/gold colour, very fine mousse; classic aromas of toast, bacon, truffles, green apple and white pepper; lively, lingering aldehydic flavours — a youthful, light style, complex, rich and rounded.
POL ROGER Brut Champagne Extra Cuvée de Réserve	18.5	77.15	France	12	300, 220	Light yellow colour, greenish tint; meaty, developed nose with complex lanolin, cheese and yeasty aromas; fresh, rich palate, bread/yeast, mushroom flavours — long and lively with a very strong nose.

Footnotes and notes to the table are overleaf

TEST: Champagne & sparkling wine

Brand	1 Score out of 20	2 Price paid (\$)	3 Origin	4 Alcohol (%)	5 Additives	6 Tasting notes
TAITTINGER Brut Reserve Champagne	18.5	77.00	France	12	300, 220	Deeper gold colour, fine bead; aromas of pencil shavings, truffles and buttery toast over strong fruit; fantastic structure, tight acid, deep truffles and bread flavours — lively with a crisp finish.
MOËT & CHANDON Brut Impérial Champagne	18	75.00	France	12	220	Straw colour; nutty, aldehyde characters and butter/malo aromas over ripe fruit; rich palate with complex layers of apple, aldehyde, and truffles flavours — complex, racy, very good length.
VEUVE CLICQUOT Ponsardin Brut Champagne	18	85.00	France	12	220	Deep, developed gold colour with persistent mousse; musk, dank and malo/butter aromas on the nose; creamy, fresh fruit palate — displays yeast complexity but lacks intensity.
BILLECART-SALMON Brut Reserve Champagne	17.5	70.00	France	12	220	Straw to gold colour, fine bead, minimal mousse; vibrant, lifted nose with honey toast, lactic and apple aromas; milky, linalin and fruit flavours, strong acid — a complex, young aperitif style.
LOUIS ROEDERER Brut Premier Champagne	17.5	83.00	France	12	220	Pale yellow colour, persistent mousse, fine bead; malo/creamy and toffee/nut aromas; complex fruit flavours, starting to dry out on the palate, aged characters — a good one to team with food.
POMMERY Brut Royal Champagne	17.5	70.00	France	12.5	300, 220	Medium lemon/gold colour, very fine bead, little mousse; buttery/toast and fruity spice aromas with a slight brine/salty note; well-structured, lean palate — a lovely crisp aperitif style.
BOLLINGER Special Cuvée Brut Champagne	17	91.00	France	12	220	Golden yellow colour, lively bead but little mousse; lifted toasty, aldehyde, marzipan, lemon and apple aromas; broad, toasty palate with muscular dryness and a hint of fruit flavour — big, soft, full.
MIXED EMOTIONS						
BOLLINGER Grande Année Brut Champagne 1996	15.5–19.5	157.00	France	12	220	Deep gold colour, fine bead; nutty, aldehyde nose (sherry-like), strong apple and paint aromas; very dry aldehyde palate with sherry, white pepper and nut flavours — powerful, distinctive, complex.
SPARKLING REDS (in rank order)						
SEPPELL Original Sparkling Shiraz 1999	17	19.00	Australia	14	220	Deep red colour; spicy/leathery aromas with aged shiraz and oak influences; leather and mushroom flavours — stewed fruit sweetness and an attractive overall dryness.
SIR JAMES Sparkling Shiraz	16.5	24.00	Australia	14	ns	Brick-red colour; brooding nose with aged shiraz, plum pudding, spice and chocolate aromas; some sweet fruit flavour and a dry, spicy finish — rich and rounded.
BANROCK STATION The Reserve Sparkling Shiraz	16	11.10	Australia	14	ns	Dark crimson colour; earthy/tarry aromas of oak and spicy, dark berries and plums; rich palate, plum-sweet with oak and tannin showing through — a little coarse, but good value.
YELLOWGLEN Red	16	12.75	Australia	12	220	Medium ruby red colour; lifted yeasty nose with aromas of tobacco, leather and 'meaty' shiraz; slightly sweet with stinky green fruit flavour and spiciness — palate showed some development age.
MCGUIGAN The Black Label Sparkling Shiraz	15.5	7.95	Australia	12.5	220	Medium dark ruby red colour showing some age; leafy and plum aromas with a smoky wood character; some green fruit and aged qualities — earthy, sweet palate under the influence of oak.
OMNI Red	15.5	11.00	Australia	14	220	Pink cherry red colour; sweet vanilla oak over jammy and spicy berry fruit aromas — a chappy character on a palate of spice and berry flavours.
SEAVIEW Sparkling Shiraz	15.5	8.50	Australia	13.5	220	Deep cherry red colour; fresh berry fruit and plum aromas with a menthol/eucalypt lift; well rounded palate with plum, cherry and confectionery flavours, a touch of spirit — good structure, dry finish.
WYNDHAM ESTATE S555 Sparkling Shiraz	15.5	14.90	Australia	14	220	Deep crimson colour; strong, sweet oak over pepper, spice, leather and confectionery aromas; licorice, tar and spice flavours — a solid, tannic wine.
ANDREW GARRETT Sparkling Burgundy	15	14.85	Australia	13	220	Aged tawny brown colour; developed nose with characters of leather, pepper, spicy fruit and chocolate; spicy palate, long and strong finish with a chocolate note — a traditional style.
MORRIS Sparkling Shiraz Durif	15	18.00	Australia	13.5	220	Medium-dark ruby red; creamy yeast nose with foxy hints and aromas of chocolate, savadist and stewed fruits; light stinky green fruit and tar flavours — finishing fresh.
YALDARA Sparkling Red	13.5	9.90	Australia	12.5	202, 220	Light ruby red colour; simple herbal/tobacco nose with delicate hints of rhubarb and cherry; green and thin apple and rhubarb flavours — a little sweet and empty.

ns None stated, but check for an allergen label when additives aren't listed — it also gives some information.

NV Non-vintage.

PNC Pinot noir chardonnay.

(A) At the time of our test we had problems finding this vintage in shops, though it should be easily available now. Previous vintages sold for \$50–\$56.

1 Score

Each expert gave the sparkling wines a score out of 20, according to the international show-scoring system for wines: 3 for appearance, 7 for nose and 10 for palate. They tasted them in five brackets, as indicated in the table.

The tasters didn't know which wine they were tasting, only in which bracket it fell. While they used the same benchmarks for judging all the wines, they were probably a bit harsher in their judgment of the more expensive wines. So the scores are only comparable within, not between, the price brackets.

The score printed in the table is the panellists' consensus score reached after the tasting, when they discussed the wines and their individual scores — still without knowing what the wines were. It's usually the average of the experts' scores.

In a few instances when a wine received too wide a range of scores and no consensus could be reached, we called it a *Mixed emotion*. The tasting notes should give you an indication of its style.

2 Price

This is the price we paid in August/September 2003, rounded to the nearest five cents. Shop around for the best deal, and watch out for specials.

3 Additives

Most sparkling wines have one or more preservatives added: **Sulphur dioxide** (220) prevents browning of the grapes (oxidation) and acts as a preservative. Many people with asthma are sensitive to sulphur dioxide and it could cause an attack. As a rule, champagnes and sparkling wines contain less than still white

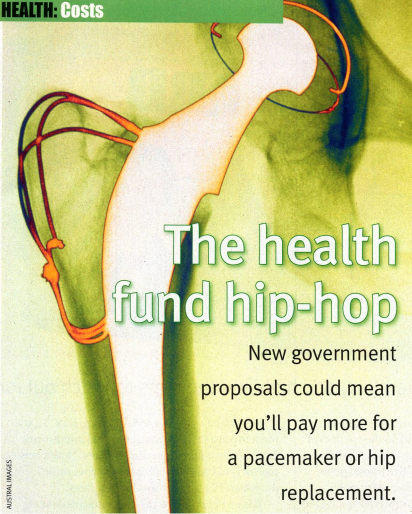
wines, because the carbon dioxide in them is a natural preservative.

Other additives include ascorbic acid (vitamin C, 300) and preservatives such as potassium sorbate (202) and potassium metabisulphite (224).

See also *What's milk doing in my wine?*, page 11, for other ingredients that could be listed on the label.

4 Tasting notes

These are compiled from the experts' tasting notes on the wine's colour, nose, palate and overall impression. Combined with the scores, they should give you a good indication of the wines' style, aroma and flavour. If you need help decoding the jargon, see page 10.



The health fund hip-hop

New government proposals could mean you'll pay more for a pacemaker or hip replacement.

IN A NUTSHELL

- **The Federal Government** is planning changes to save money for health funds on prostheses — the artificial spare parts that surgeons use.
- **Patients will have to pay extra** if surgeons want to use items the funds think are too expensive.
- **However, even though** you could pay more for your operation, insurance premiums are unlikely to fall.

n under-resourced public hospitals swamped with emergency do-or-die cases, people can wait years for their hip replacement or knee reconstruction. Many of those who can afford it have little choice but private hospitals — and private health insurance.

The government-funded boom in private insurance is funding massive price inflation in private hospitals. One category that's been giving heartburn to the government and the insurance funds is prostheses — replacement knees, artificial hips, pacemakers, bone screws, vein stents and hundreds of other items — which have been going up by over 30% a year.

So the government and the funds have got together to rein in the soaring costs of prostheses. Rather than a slash-and-burn approach they have, to their credit, taken the smarter course of trying to improve value for money instead.

The government and the funds think many of the prostheses being used by surgeons are too expensive and that cheaper alternatives could do the job just as well. Officials have used the example of an 80-year-old given the latest, expensive artificial hip that will last for many decades. A much cheaper product might not last as long but could do just as good a job for that patient.

But it won't be as simple as that in many cases. And there are real fine-print problems that could mean big bills for some patients.

SOME LOSERS

In principle, CHOICE supports the idea of improving cost effectiveness in the health system. Limited health dollars should be spent in ways that produce the best health benefits. But whenever changes like these are made, some consumers lose out.

When this policy comes in, private health funds won't have to provide no-gap cover for new products unless they've gone through a process of cost-effectiveness evaluation that's still in the planning stages but which will be dominated by industry players. CHOICE is concerned about the independence of this system, but if the government had stopped there and left coverage of existing items intact, many other problems could have been avoided.

The federal health department has simply taken the funds' own template as the basis of government policy. No prizes for guessing who comes off best.

Some items at the moment covered by no-gap private insurance won't be any longer — unless you take out extra cover, pay higher premiums and, almost certainly, serve another 12-month waiting period for any ongoing conditions. First to go will be the more expensive items in the fastest-growing categories, including some artificial hips, vein stents and defibrillators.

Surgeons will be asked to tell you if they want to use an item that's more expensive than the one on your fund's list. The theory is that it'll be your decision — but it may not work out that way in practice.

For example, if you need a new hip, and your surgeon doesn't like the cheaper artificial hip your fund wants them to use, they'll say so. If you can possibly afford to pay extra for the more expensive item, there may be considerable pressure on you to do so. After all, patients can be expected to trust their surgeon's recommendation.

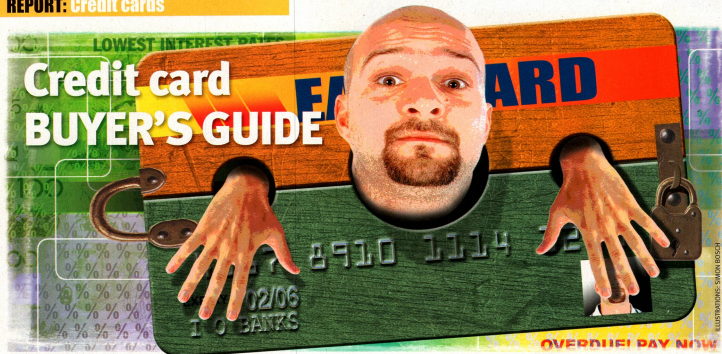
No independent government monitoring is proposed. The funds will be left to police themselves.

SMALL SAVINGS

For all the angst it's likely to cause, this measure will save a comparatively small amount. This year's federal budget lumps it in with two other measures that altogether will save the government only \$49.6 million over four years, compared with the 30% health insurance rebate that costs \$2.4 billion every year.

So if you hope this will reduce your premiums, think again!

Credit card BUYER'S GUIDE



We help you find one to suit your spending, and highlight the traps to watch out for.

IN A NUTSHELL

Consumers are experiencing fee hikes and reward scheme changes with some cards. The market's changing, so check rates and fees before deciding.

Competition is heating up, with building societies, credit unions and new entrants providing more choice.

There's little doubt that Australia's largest banks have a stranglehold on the credit card market. But while the 'big four' account for around four out of every five transactions, competition from building societies, credit unions and new entrants like VIRGIN MONEY is loosening the big banks' grip.

But the news is not all good for credit card holders. We're seeing increases in annual fees, subtle reductions in loyalty scheme benefits, and some companies surcharging shoppers for credit card payments. With so many changes, now's a great time to compare what's available.

YOUR CHOICES

Credit cards cater to different preferences — the best choice for you depends on your spending pattern and

ability to repay. Our research indicates that CHOICE readers consider low annual fees and interest-free days the most important card features. Now a new type of card has emerged that combines these desirable features with low interest rates.

Tables 1 and 2 show the best cards (depending on your repayment habits) available to consumers in at least three states (this can include, for example, availability by phone or internet).

IF YOU ALWAYS PAY IN FULL

If you always clear your monthly bill by the due date to avoid interest, look for low annual fees and a good number of interest-free days — see Table 1. It's still worth keeping an eye on the interest rate in case you miss a payment, and you might be interested in additional features like reward schemes.

Source: Cannex — www.cannex.com.au, as at October 2003.

CU Credit union.
BS Building society.

* These cards offer 30 interest-free days plus a number of days after the statement date, which is what's shown in the table.

(A) Card available in NSW, SA, Queensland and Victoria.

(B) Waived in the first year.

(C) Extra fee for reward program.

TABLE 1: Top 10 credit cards with 25 or more interest-free days (in order of annual fee, then interest rate)

Institution	Product	Annual fee (\$)	Interest rate (%)	Interest-free days*	Reward program available	Phone number	Website
VIRGIN MONEY	Credit Card	0	11.90	25	✓	1800 080 000	www.virgincard.com.au
VICTORIA TEACHERS CU	Visa Credit Card	0	13.75	25		1300 654 144	www.victeach.com.au
SAVINGS & LOANS CU SA	Women & Children's Hospital Visa	0	16.25	32		13 11 82	www.savingsloans.com.au
HERITAGE BS (A)	Heritage Visa Classic (A)	24	14.95	25	✓ (C)	13 14 22	www.heritageonline.com.au
ADELAIDE BANK	Visa Free Days	24	16.00	25		1300 652 220	www.adelaidebank.com.au
COMMONWEALTH BANK	Bankcard / Mastercard / Visa	24	16.15	25	✓ (C)	13 22 21	www.commbank.com.au
AMERICAN EXPRESS	Credit Card	25 (B)	15.79	25	✓ (C)	1300 363 687	www.americanexpress.com.au
AMP BANKING	AMP Blue Credit Card	25 (B)	15.79	25	✓ (C)	13 30 30	www.amp.com.au
AUSSIE HOME LOANS	Aussie Card	25 (B)	15.79	25	✓ (C)	13 13 33	www.aussiehomeloans.com.au
SUNCORP	Amex Blue	25 (B)	15.79	25	✓ (C)	13 11 55	www.suncorp.com.au

If you intend to pay off your entire credit card balance within the interest-free period, choose one of the cards in Table 1. Some cards offer lower introductory interest rates; the table shows standard rates.

TABLE 2: Top 10 low-interest credit cards (in order of interest rate)

Institution	Product	Interest rate (%)	Annual fee (\$)	Interest-free days*	Reward program available	Phone number	Website
MEMBERS EQUITY	Members Equity Mastercard	9.75	30	14		1300 654 990	www.membersequity.com
BANKWEST (A)	BankWest Lite Mastercard (A)	9.99	36	10		13 17 19	www.bankwest.com.au
ANZ BANK	ANZ Low Rate Mastercard	10.99	58	25		13 22 73	www.anz.com
ST GEORGE BANK / BANK SA	Starts Low Stays Low Mastercard	10.99	59	25		133 555	www.stgeorge.com.au
VIRGIN MONEY	Credit Card	11.90	0	25	✓	1800 080 000	www.virgincard.com.au
MECU	Visa CreditCard	12.00	0	0		132 888	www.mecu.com.au
BENDIGO BANK	Red Visa, Mastercard No Interest Free	12.90	0	0	✓ (C)	(03) 5433 9339	www.bendigobank.com.au
CU OF CANBERRA	Visa (B)	13.75	48	0		1300 361 761	www.cucanb.com.au
VICTORIA TEACHERS CU	Visa Credit Card	13.75	0	25		1300 654 144	www.victeach.com.au
SUNCORP	Clear Options Standard	13.90	29	0	✓ (C)	13 11 55	www.suncorp.com.au

If you're going to pay off your card over an extended period, look for low interest rates. Some of the cards in Table 2 don't have an interest-free period, but that's less important as you'll be paying interest anyway, and some have reasonable annual fees. Some cards offer lower introductory interest rates; the table shows standard rates.

IF YOU DON'T PAY IN FULL

If you tend to carry an unpaid balance from one period to the next:

- Look for a low interest rate and annual fee (see Table 2).
- The number of interest-free days is probably less important as you'll pay interest anyway.
- Compare the interest rates of other borrowing products, like personal loans and overdrafts.
- Credit unions often provide debit cards and Visa cards that access an overdraft, with lower interest than many credit cards (not included in the tables).
- If you want budgeting help, see our free interactive budget planner (go to www.choiceextra.com.au and click on Dec 03 under 'credit cards' in the index).

CREDIT UNIONS

Our last bank satisfaction survey (November 2002) showed how much CHOICE readers like credit unions' products, fees and service levels. **TEACHERS CREDIT UNION** was ranked highest overall for satisfaction with a financial institution.

While credit unions have captured less than 1% of the market, they're well worth considering, and some feature in our 'Top 10 credit cards' tables. You usually have to be a member to get a credit union's credit cards or other financial services.

If their products are only locally available we haven't included them in the tables, but it's worth checking the rates of any in your area. For example, **ENCOMPASS CREDIT UNION VISA** is only available in NSW, but has no annual fee, 25 interest-free days and, at 8.5%, even lower interest than the cards in Table 2.

Source: Canxess — www.canxess.com.au, as at October 2003.

CU Credit union.

* All cards with interest-free days offer 30 days plus a number of days after the statement date, which is what's shown in the table. Cards that don't have an interest-free period start calculating interest from the day you make a purchase.

(A) Available in WA and from Adelaide, Brisbane, Melbourne and Sydney branches. Also available nationally as part of WestBank's Lite Home Loan package.

(B) This card must be linked to a credit union account. The account fee is \$4 per month (for as many accounts as you like) if the account contains less than \$1000.

(C) Extra fee for reward program.

AVOIDING INTEREST

Gloria is typical of many people who clear their balance each month to avoid interest. However, her **NATIONAL AUSTRALIA BANK Visa Classic** isn't ideal. Even though it has 14 interest-free days after the statement date, by the time Gloria receives the bill in the post she doesn't have much time to pay.

"When the statement arrives I usually have just one week to pay up," she says. "The card doesn't give you much time to settle your bill. Other cards give at least 21 days."

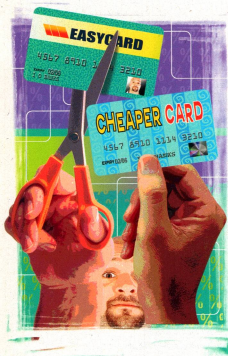
We think a card with more interest-free days would better suit Gloria's needs. Table 1 shows several good options. "I'll probably cancel the card, which means I sever ties with this bank forever," says Gloria. "If others did that too the bank would lose a lot of money."



CHANGE ON THE CARDS

Recent Reserve Bank reforms mean:

- Retailers and service providers can pass on credit card surcharges to consumers.
- 'Interchange' fees (wholesale fees banks pay other banks for credit card transactions) were reduced from October 31 this year. But card providers are finding ways to recoup this money from consumers.
- Non-banks can issue credit cards, increasing competition.



Unhappy enough to change?

Satisfaction with card and reward program	Very satisfied (%)	Somewhat satisfied (%)	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (%)	Somewhat dissatisfied (%)	Very dissatisfied (%)
Loyalty and reward program	29	46	12	10	3
Additional fee to link to program	14	10	32	21	22
Credit / charge card annual fee	12	21	22	28	18
Other fees	10	11	44	20	15
Interest rates	6	16	43	19	17

We surveyed over 800 CHOICE subscribers in July 2003, asking them about their credit cards and loyalty programs. The results show that almost half of you are dissatisfied with your credit card fees. Interest rates don't fare much better, with 36% of respondents less than impressed.

On the positive side you were more satisfied with your loyalty/reward programs — but as the table on the right shows, not everyone thinks they're great value for money.

VALUE FOR MONEY OF REWARD PROGRAM %

Excellent	9
Good	30
Fair	38
Poor	16
Very poor	6
Don't know	2

Member institutions of the Credit Union Services Corporation offer MYCARD, with the same terms across participating unions. There's a choice of two reward programs — the cheaper one costs \$35 per year, the dearer is \$55. As paying one of these fees is compulsory, they're effectively annual credit card fees — and not cheap enough for Table 1, which shows cards with the lowest annual fees.

WHAT'S THE REAL RATE?

Credit card providers don't have to advertise a comparison rate or average annual percentage rate (AAPR), as is the case in many other countries and compulsory for fixed-term mortgages in Australia since July 1 this year. Advertised card rates can be misleading — they don't include fees and compounding interest. So some cards advertising low interest aren't necessarily cheap — they can have high upfront and ongoing fees and penalties, which can make comparison difficult. Check them with the institution before deciding on a card.

A comparison rate designed to show the true borrowing cost should be a requirement for credit cards and other loans. A standard calculation method would account for most, if not all, associated fees. While a comparison rate would give a more realistic picture of the true cost, you'd still need to find the right card for your usage, comparing charges not included in the rate, and looking at other features of the credit.

For example, lots of cards charge \$20 to \$35 for late payment of the minimum amount by the due date — *on top of interest*. So if you're late paying off a \$50 balance with VIRGIN, for example, you can be charged \$25 — effectively a 50% fee. It's by no means unique in this charge, and the company says it gives two warnings before charging.

Card tricks

- Annual fees are sometimes waived for minimum annual card spends — usually ranging from around \$2500 to \$12,000.
- Crediting some cards with money before making cash withdrawals (for example, before a holiday) can reduce interest paid. But cash advance fees are often charged whether or not you're in credit — check your card's conditions.
- Charge cards (from AMERICAN EXPRESS and DINERS CLUB) are another option if you always pay on time, but there are annual fees, and high penalties (around 3%) for late payments.

TRAPS

- We've heard about merchants surcharging up to 3% for credit card payments. Qantas charges 1%, and some travel agents, taxis, restaurants and petrol stations are surcharging. Other payment methods may be cheaper.
- Introductory 'honeymoon' rates usually last just six months. Then the card reverts to its normal higher rate.
- Late payment fees are up to \$35.
- Some institutions backdate interest on unpaid balances to the purchase date. Calculating interest from the 'payment due' or at least the billing date is fairer.
- Cash advances: interest is typically charged from the withdrawal date, and fees apply.
- Watch out for high charges for exceeding your credit limit.
- Adverts don't necessarily give the full picture — check out all fees and charges.

Your say on GM

Recently we invited some CHOICE Online subscribers to take part in a survey on genetically modified (GM) foods and how they're labelled. The results were used to support the Consumers' Association's submission to the Food Standards Australia New Zealand review of GM labelling of food.

Thank you to the 645 people who participated. Your responses were very helpful and supported our argument that consumers are still concerned about GM foods and want them to be labelled so that they can make an informed choice between GM and non-GM foods.

Here's what you told us:

- 84% of you are concerned about eating genetically modified food.
- 72% try to look for foods that haven't been genetically modified.
- 94% agreed that there should be comprehensive labelling of GM foods and ingredients.
- 75% disagree with the current GM labelling laws that exempt GM canola oil from carrying GM labelling because the GM component isn't considered to be present in the final product.

This last point illustrates the confusion about the GM status of foods whose labels don't make any reference to GM. 44% of you thought that no reference to genetic modification means the product hasn't been genetically modified, which isn't necessarily so. Only GM ingredients, additives or processing aids that are still present in the final food need to be labelled. If they're used in the manufacturing process but aren't present in the final product, or have been refined to such an extent that there's no genetic material left in the final product, labelling isn't required. However, many consumers still want to know about any genetic modifications, perhaps for environmental or ethical reasons.

Only 39% knew that no GM label doesn't necessarily mean no genetic modification is involved. This is good evidence that the current labelling regulations are unhelpful to most consumers. 18% were unsure what no mention of GM means.

If you're interested in viewing our submission to Food Standards Australia New Zealand got to www.choice.com.au and click on the 'food' category, then 'labelling and advertising'.



TAMARA GRAHAM

Custard for your christmas pud

These days there's such a wide variety of ready-made custards on the market that it's hard to justify the time spent making your own. But are they up to the taste test? We asked custard eaters to taste all the refrigerated and UHT custards we could find in the supermarket that are widely available, to give you the inside running on what to serve with your Christmas pudding this year.

None of the custards was given a rave rating, but several were considered to be OK. You may be surprised to find so many of the UHT custards up the top of the table. They're a convenient cupboard item that won't go off if the Christmas hordes don't go through as many cartons as you thought.

Less surprisingly, perhaps, our trialists didn't like the lower-fat custards as much — they all ended up at the bottom of the table. And given that you're only saving 50 to 100 kJ and around 2–3 g of fat per 100 mL compared to our top custards, you can probably afford to let go and try one of them.

* The overall score is a separate rating by the 14 trialists, not a combination of the taste and texture scores.

** Kilojoules rounded to the nearest 10; fat rounded to the nearest 0.1 g.

† Based on the price we paid in October 2003. Prices are given per 500 g for easy comparison — not all products are available in this size; rounded to the nearest 5 cents.

Product (in rank order)	Type	Overall score (%)†	Taste score (%)	Texture score (%)	kJ per 100 g**	Fat (%)**	Price per 500 g / mL (\$)†
DAIRY FARMERS Dairy Custard Vanilla	Fresh	60	60	65	420	3.2	1.20
DAIRY FARMERS Dairy Custard Vanilla	UHT	60	60	60	450	3.4	1.20
HOME BRAND Vanilla Custard	UHT	60	60	65	390	3.4	0.95
BROOKDALE Custard Vanilla (Aldi)	UHT	55	50	50	420	3.4	0.90
COLES FARMLAND Custard Vanilla	UHT	55	50	65	390	3.4	0.95
PAULS Premium Vanilla Custard	Fresh	50	55	45	570	6.0	2.20
DAIRY FARMERS Pouring Custard	Fresh	45	45	65	360	2.0	1.15
FOSTER CLARK'S Custard Vanilla	UHT	45	45	45	410	3.3	1.60
PAULS Vanilla Custard	Fresh	45	45	60	430	2.5	1.20
DAIRY FARMERS Light Vanilla Custard	Fresh	40	40	50	320	0.9	1.35
PAULS Trim Custard	Fresh	40	35	60	370	0.9	1.20
PAULS No Fat Vanilla Custard	Fresh	30	25	40	340	0.1	1.20

It's in the

Packaged salads are convenient, but they're relatively expensive and the quality can leave a lot to be desired.

IN A NUTSHELL

■ Packaged salads are great for singles or couples. You can get an interesting and nutritious mixed salad without buying a whole lot of different ingredients that may end up going to waste.

■ But you can pay up to 10 times the cost per kilogram compared with buying whole lettuce, cucumbers and tomatoes.

■ And check the quality — look out for brown or wilted bits and always check the use-by date.

Curly or frilly, red or green — lettuce comes in lots of different varieties these days. You don't have to stick to the traditional Aussie salad of iceberg lettuce, cucumber, tomato and a few shallots.

Salad's always been easy to prepare, great to have with a barbie or picnic. All you have to do is wash and dry the ingredients, cut them up and put them in a bowl — dressing optional. Now it's easier than ever. Most supermarkets have ready-made salads in the produce section.

You use them straight from the bag — no washing, no cutting up. And some of them come with their own dressing in a separate sealed container, or even fancier embellishments such as croutons, grated cheese and bacon pieces. What you find will depend on the season, the store and the location. But even in winter we found more than 40 different mixes in Sydney.

A high price for convenience

Unfortunately all this convenience comes at a price. You can pay a lot to be saved the trouble of washing a lettuce. Packaged salads cost anything from about \$7 to \$46 per kilo (and the cheapest are usually only chopped iceberg lettuce). It's much cheaper to make up a salad from the individual ingredients.

A lettuce, a cucumber, some tomatoes and a few shallots give you salad for about \$4.50 per kg. And before they're cut up they should stay fresh in the fridge for at least a week — longer than the packaged varieties seem to do.

But of course you end up with nearly a kilogram of salad from one lettuce, far too much for one or two people at a sitting. Even if you make a number of smaller salads over a week or so from the same ingredients there's inevitably some waste.

Another catch is that you miss out on the rich variety of salad greens now available — and on some of the health-giving antioxidants found particularly in

BAG



the dark green and more heavily pigmented leaves such as spinach, rocket and radicchio. Packaged salads also often contain cabbage, which is another good source of antioxidants and other health-promoting phytochemicals (chemicals found in plants).

An alternative is to buy the loose mixed salad leaves (mesclun mix) often seen in fruit and vegetable shops. These typically cost from \$12 to \$18 per kg. You should wash them well, but there's no other preparation needed.

Brown around the edges

The big problem with packaged salads is that lettuce and other salad vegetables deteriorate rapidly once they're cut up.

The most obvious sign of trouble is the familiar brown discolouration at the edges. This is caused by the plant's natural defence mechanisms trying to repair the damage and prevent invasion of the plant tissue by moulds and bacteria.

We bought 41 packaged salads from supermarkets in Sydney and took a careful look at them. With an average of four days left before the use-by date, a third of them already had obvious brown bits.

We then stored the salads at the recommended temperature (1–4°C) and had another look at them on their use-by date. Two-thirds now had obvious signs of deterioration. At the same time we opened each bag and sniffed the contents. Nearly half had a distinctly unpleasant odour that's another indication of breakdown of the plant tissue.



PACKAGED WATER?

A typical lettuce is about 96% water, so why bother with salad?

It seems that the remaining 4% is packed with goodies. Lettuce and other salad ingredients, such as tomato, cucumber, cabbage, carrot and onion, are excellent sources of vitamins and minerals.

About a third of that critical 4% is dietary fibre that's good for heart health and probably protective against bowel cancer, and researchers are now finding more and more other components, mostly antioxidants that are found particularly in dark green and other coloured salad vegetables, which can protect us against heart disease and cancer.

So choose carefully. Based on our experience, here are some buying tips:

- Look for packages with the most days left before the expiry date.
- Have a good look at the contents and avoid any with tell-tale brown bits.
- Some types go off faster than others. Deterioration depends on the amount of chopping, so salads with intact leaves (like baby spinach) keep for longer.
- And unless you're passionate about iceberg lettuce, go for salads with plenty of dark green and heavily pigmented leaves. As well as being loaded with antioxidants, they taste more interesting.

And the good news ... no bugs

Normally you'd make sure salad vegetables are clean and relatively free from dangerous bacteria by washing them in running water (see *Wash it well*, far right), but packaged salads are promoted as having already been washed (some of them say they're "triple washed") and ready to eat straight from the bag. Are they really safe?

We were sceptical at first because packaged salads have been identified as the cause of outbreaks of food poisoning overseas and there are reports of the bacteria *Listeria monocytogenes* and salmonella having been found in packaged salads in the USA and UK. *Listeria* can grow at the temperatures at which these salads are stored and displayed, and pregnant women have been advised to avoid them because of a perceived risk of infection from *Listeria monocytogenes*, which can cause miscarriage or premature birth.

So we bought 79 packaged salads from supermarkets in Sydney and Brisbane, kept them at the recommended storage temperature until their use-by date and then tested them.

We're pleased to report that none of them had detectable levels of *Listeria monocytogenes* or any species of salmonella bacteria.

Keep it fresher for longer

Whether you buy packaged salad or your own individual salad ingredients, here's how to keep them in good condition for as long as possible.

- Lettuce and other salad greens are best kept in the fridge's crisper to prevent them from drying out. The temperature should be below 5°C but not freezing. (Frozen lettuce might look OK, but as soon as it thaws it turns into green slime.)
- The only way to be really sure you've accurately set the controls is to have a fridge thermometer. Check the temperature in the crisper itself — we've found that some crispers can be extra-cold.
- You often see advice to cut the core out of lettuce. Don't do it. The more a lettuce is damaged the faster it deteriorates. The same applies to washing. Don't wash it until you're ready to use it. Washing inevitably damages the leaves, and in any case, dry leaves keep better than wet ones.
- Hydroponic lettuces come with their roots on. They're still growing and keep well with their roots in water. You can either keep them in the fridge or out in the kitchen, like a house plant. (They benefit from some sunlight.) Use the outer leaves first.
- Keep lettuce away from fruit (including tomatoes). Fruit can give off ethylene gas, a powerful plant hormone. The lettuce responds to ethylene by going into a rapid decline and turning yellow. (Tomatoes are best not kept in the fridge at all. Their flavour is better if they're not chilled.) ■

WASH IT WELL

Washing lettuce removes more than the dirt. Washing under running water can also remove up to 99% of any bacteria from salad vegetables. But you have to be sure to separate the leaves.



How to REDUCE SPAM

There's no surefire way to stop spam, but there are ways to reduce it.

TIP

If the amount of spam in your inbox becomes too much to handle, consider getting a new email address and starting from scratch.

If you have an email address, you're probably no stranger to spam — unsolicited commercial email that arrives in your inbox from someone you've never heard of, about nothing you're interested in, addressed to no one in particular. So how do spammers find your email address and what can you do to reduce the chances of it being found?

CHANGE YOUR HABITS

Spammers collect your email address in a number of ways, including asking you to fill in online forms, searching for it on newsgroups, email lists and web pages, or using 'cookies' (special software) that collect information stored in your internet browser — the program you use to access and view websites. By adopting some new internet habits you can reduce the chances of your email address being found.

- Only give your email address to people you really want to receive mail from.
- When you register to use a website or receive an electronic newsletter, your email may be collected in a database that's sold to third parties. Always read the website's privacy statement — it should state

what the company plans to do with your personal details, including your email address. Also look for a tick box where you can refuse permission to pass on your details to marketers.

- Create a 'junk' email address to use instead of your regular email when registering with any websites you feel may be less than legit. Free webmail services that you could use to do this include Yahoo! (www.yahoo.com) or Hotmail (www.hotmail.com). Also use this address when posting messages to online newsgroups, mailing lists and forums.
- Spammers often use name lists as a basis for producing email addresses, so if you have a webmail account (Yahoo! or Hotmail, for example), use a 'coded' login name that consists of letters and numbers and isn't obviously related to a name.
- If you regularly participate in 'high spam risk' activities such as instant messaging, use an alternative email address or disguise your address to fool automated programs. Add an extra space or word to your valid address (consumer@choicenosspam.com.au), or spell it out: for example, consumer (at) choice (dot) com (dot) au — people should be able to work out your correct address.

GOT SPAM ALREADY?

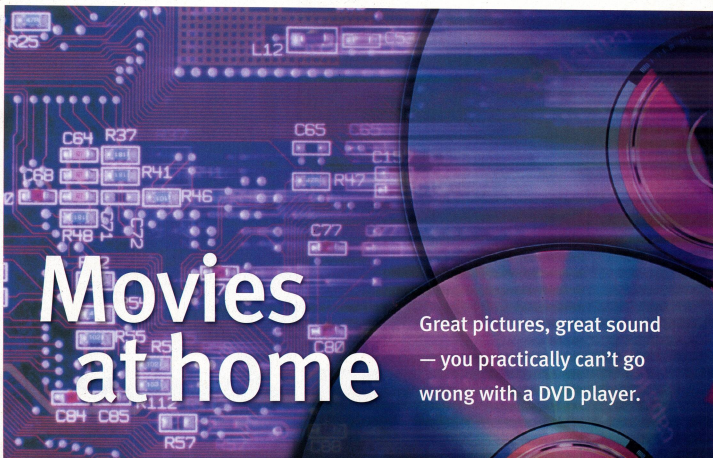
The tips above should help reduce the chances of your email address being added to new spammers' mailing lists, but what can you do about the spam you've already received or lists you're already on?

Consider spam-filtering software that blocks suspect messages before they reach your inbox. Some email programs, such as Microsoft Outlook 2003 and Poco Systems PocoMail, include spam filters, or you can install a standalone program. Alternatively, some internet service providers (ISP) and webmail services (such as Yahoo! and Hotmail again) also offer spam filters.

Be warned, however: some spam filters can also block legitimate email — look for programs that flag correctly addressed messages that didn't make it through the filter instead of deleting them, allowing you to decide whether they're legitimate.

Never reply to spam email, even if you're given the option to unsubscribe from the mailing list. If spammers know your email address is an active account, it's likely you'll receive even more junk mail. Your best bet is to delete spam messages before opening them.

For more free information on spam, go to www.choice.com.au/computers and type 'spam' in the search box.



Great pictures, great sound
— you practically can't go
wrong with a DVD player.

IN A NUTSHELL

■ All the DVD players we tested produced good sound and near perfect pictures, but one stood out for ease of use.

■ Overall, though, you'd probably be happy enough with just about all the models tested.

You might think testing DVD players is like a day at the movies, but there's more to it than just watching. Picture and sound quality are assessed and measured, not to mention putting standard scratches and black marks onto DVDs to check how the players handle faulty discs.

To find DVD players worthy of a Sunday afternoon movie marathon, we also checked ease of use and measured energy consumption on standby.

BUY WITH CONFIDENCE

All the models rated very well for picture and sound quality, and once you got used to operating them you'd probably be happy with any of them.

We've recommended the top nine in the *What to buy* list (right) because the models below them in the table (page 24) have slightly lower scores for one or more of the other factors rated — ease of use, faulty disc handling and standby energy use.

The **PIONEER** is a clear standout for ease of use — mainly because its remote control is very user-friendly and programming CD and DVD playback is easy. Its onscreen display and menus are easy to follow too. The **PHILIPS DVD 626K/751** scored worst for ease of use: its poorly designed front panel let it down.

WHAT TO BUY

PIONEER DV-466-S	\$299
SHARP DV-SL10X	\$249
JVC XV-N335L	\$275
AIWA XD-AX10	\$199
SAMSUNG DVD-E137B	\$199
LG DV771P	\$269
NEC NDV-31	\$229
PANASONIC DVD-S35	\$329
PHILIPS DVD626K/751	\$219

BEST BUY

BEST BUY

What about the rest?

- The **PHILIPS DVD626K/751** and **KENWOOD** are comparatively harder to use.
- The **OMNI** is the worst for sound quality, though still good.
- The **SANYO** and **OMNI**, and even more so the **KENWOOD**, use a lot of energy on standby.
- The **TOSHIBA** and **SONY** are equal worst at handling faulty discs.

Brand / model (in rank order)	PERFORMANCE						7 FEATURES			
	1 Overall score (%)	2 Picture quality score (%)	3 Sound quality score (%)	4 Ease of use score (%)	5 Faulty disc handling score (%)	6 Standby energy score (%)	Child lock	PAL output playing NTSC DVD	Can play a region 1 DVD	Micro socket control
PIONEER DV-466-S	91	100	93	83	90	90			✓	
SHARP DV-SL10X	89	96	92	70	100	90				
JVC XV-N33SL	88	100	90	73	90	90		✓		
AIWA XD-AX10	87	100	94	73	80	90	✓		✓	
SAMSUNG DVD-E137B	87	100	89	74	90	80			✓	
LG DV7711P	86	96	90	67	90	90		✓		
NEC NDV-31	86	96	93	71	85	90		✓		✓
PANASONIC DVD-S35	86	96	90	71	90	80			✓	
PHILIPS DVD625K/751	86	100	94	67	88	80		✓	✓	✓
PHILIPS DVD626K/751	85	100	93	60	88	90		✓	✓	✓
SONY DVP-N5530	85	100	94	73	70	90	✓		✓	
SANYO DVD-SL25	83	96	87	71	100	40	✓		✓	
TOSHIBA SD-2500Y	81	96	89	67	70	80			✓	
OMNI DV-5000	80	100	77	71	90	40			✓	
KENWOOD DVF-3070	79	100	92	63	95	5 (A)		✓	✓	

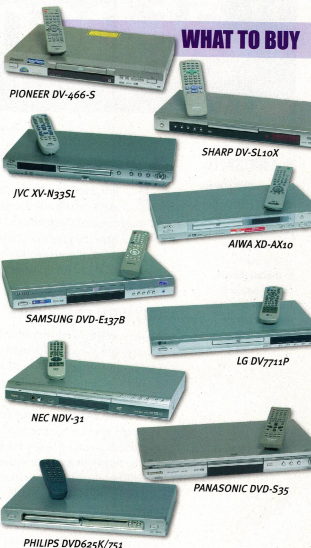
Features (almost) all have

The table lists which players have some useful features. Others they all have (unless noted otherwise) include:

- Composite, S-video and component video output.
- Stereo and digital audio output.
- RCA audio/video (AV) cables for composite video supplied.
- Batteries for the remote control supplied (except the **SANYO**).
- Can play DVDs, CDs and VCDs.
- Can play recordable and rewritable CDs and DVDs, excluding DVD-RAM.
- Can play region 3 DVDs (South-east Asia and East Asia, including Hong Kong — handy if you want to buy DVDs while travelling in this region).
- Dolby Digital and DTS capability (the two most common multi-channel sound formats) as well as stereo sound.
- Dynamic range control (except the **SANYO**).
- 4:3 letterbox, 4:3 pan and scan, and 16:9 widescreen TV shape settings.
- Selectable or adjustable picture settings (except the **LG** and **NEC**).
- Skip to the start of the previous or next DVD chapter/CD track.
- Fast play forward or reverse.
- Slow view forward.
- Still/pause.
- Resume play for DVD.
- Step-by-step movement forward for DVD.
- A to B repeat (you can mark the beginning and end of a CD or DVD segment for replay).
- Play a DVD title or chapter, or an entire CD or just one of its tracks repeatedly.
- One-touch skip to the start of the current CD track (except both **PHILIPS**).
- Programmed play for CD.
- Selectable camera angle, subtitle language and dialogue language.
- Non-English onscreen display/menus.
- On/standby key on remote control (except the **KENWOOD**).

For more information about features and picture and sound output options, see **CHOICE**, December 2002, or go to www.choiceextra.com.au and click on Dec 02 under "DVD players" in the index.

WHAT TO BUY



PHOTOS: ANTHONY SAWERS

	SPECIFICATIONS				
channel oded io output	Dimensions (H x W x D, mm)*	Warranty (years)	Origin	Manufacturer / distributor	Price (\$)**
	55 x 420 x 285	1	China	Pioneer	299
	55 x 435 x 220	1	China	Sharp	249
	55 x 435 x 250	1	China	Hagemeyer	275
	55 x 430 x 235	1	Malaysia	Sony	199
	60 x 430 x 245	1	Indonesia	Samsung	199
	50 x 430 x 250	1	China	LG	269
	60 x 430 x 245	1	China	NEC	229
	60 x 430 x 270	1	China	Panasonic	329
	50 x 360 x 295	1	China	Philips	219
	50 x 360 x 295	1	China	Philips	199
	55 x 430 x 245	1	Malaysia	Sony	279
	55 x 360 x 255	1	China	Sanyo	199
	70 x 430 x 230	1	China	Castel	299
	55 x 430 x 280	1	China	Galas Electronics	199
	75 x 440 x 285	1	China	Kenwood	299

* Rounded up to the next 5 mm; all protruding parts except the cord included.

** Prices are the recommended or average retail price, as provided by manufacturers in October 2003.

(A) Not switchable to standby but the front panel indicator can be dimmed.

How reliable have subscribers found them?

We asked subscribers if their DVD player had needed repairing in the previous 12 months.

The players were all fairly new, all having been bought in the past two years. Playing problems were the most common (almost 10%), particularly with **SAMSUNG** and **TEAC** models (19% and 17% reporting this, respectively).

The graph shows the results for brands for which we received enough replies to report on (the number in brackets is the number of responses). Differences of more than 8% are meaningful.

PERCENTAGE NOT NEEDING REPAIR

Philips (100)	98
Pioneer (366)	98
LG (86)	97
Panasonic (230)	97
Toshiba (190)	97
Sony (394)	96
Teac (64)	92
Samsung (88)	85

1 Overall score

This is a combination of the following:

- Picture quality: 25%
- Sound quality: 20%
- Ease of use: 25%
- Faulty disc handling: 20%
- Standby energy consumption: 10%

2 Picture quality

We viewed standard patterns and still pictures as well as some movies, looking for centring, brightness, sharpness, straight unwarped lines and colour purity without distortion.

3 Sound quality

We listened for differences when the sound was coming from three different outputs — CD stereo, DVD stereo and DVD digital surround sound. We also measured various technical aspects of sound quality, and it's in these tests that the players' sound quality varied. Most people probably won't hear any differences.

4 Ease of use

We performed various 'actual use' tasks following the instruction manuals. If a task could be done with little or no use of the instructions, the model scored better. We also looked at:

- Remote control.
- Front panel controls.
- Front panel indicator display.
- Onscreen display and menus.
- Programming CD and DVD playback.

5 Faulty disc handling

We used a standard test CD with interruptions on the data surface to simulate scratches and dirt respectively. We also created a similarly damaged DVD with deep scratches and large black dots — more damage than you'd normally encounter. The players would probably cope well with less severe imperfections.

6 Standby energy

We measured the power used by each player in standby mode or equivalent (when the player's been turned off by the remote control but is still connected to power).

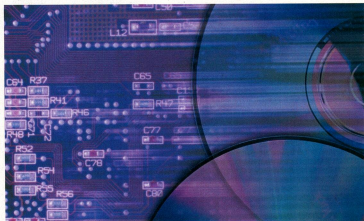
7 Features

Play an NTSC DVD and produce a PAL-compatible output. NTSC is a picture format used in other countries, such as in the USA, Australia and New Zealand use the PAL format. Some players can produce a PAL signal even when the disc is NTSC. With others, you'll need an NTSC-compatible TV. However, almost all new TVs are NTSC-compatible.

Can play a region 1 DVD. This could be important if you buy DVDs from overseas. Australia is in region 4; the US, Canada and US territories are in region 1.

5.1-channel decoded audio output. This is for surround sound/home theatre systems. The player does the task of extracting the digital surround sound information from the disc and sends it out as separate channels — front left, front right, front centre, surround left, surround right and subwoofer (low-frequency channel). You need a corresponding set of inputs in your sound system. If a DVD player doesn't do this decoding you need a surround sound system that does it instead.

See CHOICE, December 2002, for more information on features, or go to www.choiceextra.com.au and click on Dec 02 under 'DVD players' in the index.



WHAT TO BUY

The top five models are profiled on this page. Prices are those provided by manufacturers in September 2003.



PHOTOGRAPHY: LITE WEGMANN

PANASONIC JUICE EXTRACTOR MJ-66PRA

Price: \$163

GOOD POINTS

- A large jug (not supplied) can be used to collect juice.
- Large internal pulp container (see page 29 for *What to look for* in a pulp container).
- Good-sized chute.
- It comes with a brush attached to a bottle which can be filled with water and used to clean the sieve.
- Easy to store.

BAD POINTS

- No safety lock system, which means the juicer can operate without the lid in place.
- Some people's fingers will be able to reach the blade assembly.

Safety first

- Always use the safety plunger supplied — and not your fingers — to push fruit and vegetable pieces down the chute.
- Take care with spilled juice. Don't let spills accumulate under a juice extractor, where they could get sucked up through ventilation holes into the motor. The juicer could become "live" and give you an electric shock if you touch it. Switch off the motor and unplug the cord before you clean up any spills.



RUSSELL HOBBS THE JUICELADY JL500

Price: \$229

GOOD POINTS

- Fairly easy to assemble and disassemble.
- A large jug (not supplied) can be used to collect juice.
- Extra-large pulp container, which can be emptied without removing the blade unit.
- Good-sized chute.
- Comprehensive, easy-to-understand instructions including nutrition information, troubleshooting guide, recipes and CD.

BAD POINTS

- Removing the filter and filter basket from the motor unit can be awkward.
- Juice continues to drip after the motor's stopped.
- The controls can be a little awkward.

Fresh

It sounds good, but which juicers will you really use?

IN A NUTSHELL

- On test: 13 juice extractors ranging from \$30 to \$230.
- If you're not willing to pay around \$100 or more for a juicer, the bad news is the cheaper models didn't work so well.

The juicers in this test all operate on the same principle: you cut the fruit and vegies into chunks, and push them with a safety plunger down a feeding chute onto a rotating blade where they're pulped. A fine, curved sieve separates the pulp from the juice. Most models can extract juice from around 1 kg of fruit or vegies in less than three minutes.

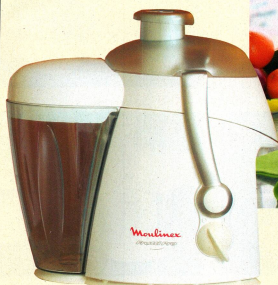
The standout models are the **BREVILLE Juice Fountain** and **PANASONIC Juice Extractor**. They produce very good-quality juice, can handle large quantities of fruit and vegetables at one go, have large chutes (which means less chopping) and are easy to use and clean. The two **MOULINEX** models and the **RUSSELL HOBBS The Juicelady** didn't score quite as well, but are good all rounders and make it into our *What to buy* list.

GET A GOOD ONE

If the juicer doesn't live up to your expectations, it'll merely take up valuable cupboard space. You can't tell by looking

Continued on page 28

juice



MOULINEX FRUTTI PRO JUICE EXTRACTOR BKA14E

Price: \$120

GOOD POINTS

- Very easy to assemble and disassemble.
- A large jug (not supplied) can be used to collect juice.
- Large pulp container.
- Good-sized chute.
- Dishwasher-safe.

BAD POINTS

- Juice can leak onto the motor base around the drive shaft.
- Some people's fingers will be able to reach the blade assembly.



BREVILLE JUICE FOUNTAIN JE9S

Price: \$188

GOOD POINTS

- Large juice jug with a lid supplied; no leaking or splashing.
- Large pulp container, which can be emptied without removing the blade unit.
- Extra-large chute — can fit whole (small to medium) apples and oranges.
- Comprehensive, easy-to-understand instructions including nutrition information, troubleshooting guide and recipes.
- Dishwasher-safe (on the top shelf only).

BAD POINTS

- Removing the filter and filter basket from the motor unit can be awkward.
- The safety locking arm requires a little strength to lock.
- Some people's fingers will be able to reach the blade assembly.
- It's a tall, bulky unit that may be difficult to store.



MOULINEX A753 45

Price: \$100

GOOD POINTS

- Fairly easy to assemble and disassemble.
- A large jug (not supplied) can be used to collect juice.
- A large pulp container, which can be emptied without removing the blade unit.
- Good-sized chute.

BAD POINTS

- Pulp can accumulate around the filter.
- Some people's fingers will be able to reach the blade assembly.
- The switch is stiff and awkward to operate. (The manufacturer tells us this model has been discontinued, but you may still find it in stores.)

Continued from page 26

at a juicer how well it will juice, but some of the other differences between the good and not-so-good are:

■ A larger chute size means that larger pieces of fruit can be used — there's less chopping to do. The **BREVILLE Juice Fountain** took whole or halved peeled apples and oranges and the **PANASONIC** took them halved. But they had to be cut into quarters, eighths or even smaller for the **BREVILLE JE3**, **TIFFANY** and **KENWOOD**.

■ Never underestimate the importance of cleanability when it comes to multipart kitchen gadgets. The fewer the parts, the easier it is to assemble, take apart and clean. A streamlined design with few cracks or crevices means less food can get trapped, which also makes cleaning easier. The **KENWOOD** and **TIFFANY** were hardest to clean. It also helps if you clean your juicer as soon as practical after you've used it — dry juice and pulp residues are harder to clean, particularly on the fine sieve.

■ A small juice and/or pulp collector is fine if you're only making juice for one or two, but if you have to stop halfway through to empty them, it becomes fiddly and messy.

■ The **BREVILLE JE3**, **KENWOOD** and **MISTRAL Juice Factory** came with a rotary citrus squeezer, which makes a smoother, less fleshy orange juice. ■

WHAT ABOUT THE REST?

■ While some models scored well for ease of use, their juicing scores were all lower than those in the *What to buy* list. The **KENWOOD** and **TIFFANY** had comparatively low ease of use scores too.

Breville Vegetable and Citrus Duo JE3



Mistral Super Juicer MJExoo



Mistral Juice Factory MJF50



Prima JE-9214



Kenwood JE700



Brand / model (in rank order)	PERFORMANCE			4 FEATURES				SPECIFICATIONS
	1 Overall score (%)	2 Juicing score (%)	3 Ease of use score (%)	Safety lid lock	Juice jug capacity (mL)	Pulp container internal or external?	Dishwasher-safe	
PANASONIC Juice Extractor MJ-66PRA	88	90	85		na	Internal	1	325 x 290 x 220
BREVILLE Juice Fountain JE95	87	90	84	✓	1000	External	2	420 x 325 x 210
MOULINEX Frutti Pro Juice Extractor BKA14E	80	75	84	✓	na	External	1	305 x 280 x 175
RUSSELL HOBBS The Juicelady JL500	77	78	76	✓	na	External	2	370 x 360 x 215
MOULINEX A753 45 (A)	76	82	70	✓	na	External	1	280 x 265 x 175
BREVILLE Vegetable and Citrus Duo JE3	74	63	85	✓	600	Internal	1	300 x 235 x 210
SUNBEAM Pure Juice JE4700	74	65	83	✓	na	External	1	290 x 280 x 170
MISTRAL Super Juicer MJE100 (A)	73	65	80	✓	500	Internal	1	305 x 280 x 175
MISTRAL Juice Factory MJF50 (A)	72	65	79	✓	500	Internal	2	305 x 280 x 175
BREVILLE Vitamax JEB55	69	68	70	✓	400	Internal	1	270 x 250 x 215
PRIMA JE-9214	67	61	73	✓	500	External	1	320 x 235 x 210
KENWOOD JE700	62	58	66	✓	600	Internal	1	340 x 210 x 175
TIFFANY JE 603 Juice Extractor	57	59	55	✓	350	External	1	290 x 270 x 285

Sunbeam Pure
Juice JE4700



Breville
Vitamax JEB55



Tiffany JE 603
Juice Extractor



What to look for

■ **Collecting juice.** Some juice extractors come supplied with a juice jug. Sometimes it slots into the juicer itself, which is less messy, as juice is less likely to splash onto the workbench; other juice jugs are separate. On models without a juice jug, you'll need to find one that fits under the spout height and position.

■ **Collecting pulp.** Pulp is collected in a cavity around the sieve (inside the juicer) or a container attached to it (on the outside). With an internal pulp container, check that the sieve and its surrounding cavity can be removed together. If it has to be taken apart before removal, it's messier. With an external pulp container, less pulp is likely to build up around the sieve and clog it, and if you want to juice a large quantity, you don't have to stop and disassemble the juicer to remove the pulp. The table lists which models have an external pulp collector.

■ **A safety lid lock** is an important safety feature that won't let you operate the juice extractor unless the lid's locked into place. The **PANASONIC** doesn't have this feature.

■ If there are **two speeds**, the higher is usually better for hard fruit and vegies.

Also see *Get a good one*, page 26.

For people with a disability

The best overall is the **PANASONIC**, which can be used one-handed, and will suit people with poor co-ordination or poor vision:

- It's easy to assemble/disassemble. However, the latch could be difficult for people with little strength.
- The switch is bright and large, and doesn't need a lot of strength to operate.
- The large chute means minimal chopping beforehand.
- The spout is a good height and can be used in conjunction with a jug suited to the user.
- Cleaning is easy as long as it's done immediately after use.

Warranty (years)	Origin	Manufacturer / distributor	Price (\$)*
	Japan	Panasonic	163
	China	Breville	188
	Spain	Groupe SEB	120
	China	Salton	229
	Spain	Groupe SEB	100
	China	Breville	87
	China	Sunbeam	80
	China	Mistral	65
	China	Mistral	90
	China	Breville	90
	China	Prima Australasia	33
	China	Hagemeyer	105
	China	GAF Control Sales	50

* Prices are recommended or average retail, as provided by manufacturers in September 2003, unless noted otherwise.

na Not applicable — no juice jug supplied.

(A) The manufacturer tells us this model has been discontinued, but you may still find it in shops.

(B) On the top shelf only.

(C) Pulp container only.

(D) Attachments only.

(E) 10 years on mesh and blades.

1 Overall score

Juicing and ease of use are weighted equally to give the overall score.

2 Juicing score

This includes our assessments of ease of juicing, quality of the juice and problems encountered. We juiced carrots, apples, oranges, watermelon and pineapple. A juicer tends to make all juice frothy to a certain extent, so you may have to adapt your taste to this; we took the amount of froth produced into account in our assessments.

3 Ease of use

We assessed how easy it is to:

- Assemble and disassemble the juicer.
- Use the controls.
- Clean all the parts.
- Collect the juice and remove the pulp.

4 Features

See *What to look for*, above.



Digital does it

Preserve your favourite memories in high, never deteriorating quality.

IN A NUTSHELL

- We tested 20 models from under \$1000 to almost \$4000. One medium-priced model made it into our What to buy list.
- While the picture quality of all the tested models is much better than that of analogue camcorders, only a few take full advantage of the technology and provide recordings of DVD quality.
- The built-in microphone often records the camcorder's running noises, which can be disturbing. Look for a model that lets you connect an external microphone.

Like many other digital products, digital camcorders have been improving at an impressive speed over the last few years — so much so that we had to adjust our scoring system to leave room for future improvements. So while the level of scores in this test is generally lower than in the last one (CHOICE, Jan/Feb 2003), it doesn't mean camcorders have become worse. The two sets of results aren't comparable.

WHAT YOU GET

If a digital camcorder is for you, you can expect:

- **Picture quality** that's clearly better than that of highband analogue systems. However, many of the tested models don't fully use the potential of the technology, mainly lacking sharpness. Only the top two record video in a quality similar to that of a DVD player.
- Potentially hifi-quality **sound**. However, only a few of the built-in microphones realise that potential — many suffer from their small size, and can't avoid recording disturbing running noises from the tape or disk drive, or the motor zoom.
- On most models this can be improved dramatically by using an external microphone, and if sound's important to you, or you expect to make many 'natural' sound recordings (without voiceover, background music or similar), we recommend you look for a model that lets you connect one.
- Amazingly small and lightweight camcorders

packed with generally **easy-to-use** menu-controlled features and functions. However, be aware that most models are designed to be held with the right hand and using the right eye to look through the viewfinder. So if you're left-handed, check which model you're comfortable with. On most models you access the function menus via buttons or a joystick. Some have a touchscreen monitor, which is usually a bit slower.

- The ability to **play back** your recordings on your TV, and to transfer them to a computer for near-professional editing (if you have the necessary software) without loss of quality (see *Which connection?*, below, for the different connection options).
- The ability to take **still photos** on the tape and/or a memory card. However, the photo quality is generally clearly worse than that of a good digital still camera — not only because of the comparatively low resolution (less than two megapixels), but also because the same lens system is used for video and still photo recordings, which leads to compromises with the exposure and white balance settings. The exception is the **SAMSUNG VP-D5000i**, which has a separate lens system for still photos. It achieves by far the best quality, comparable to a good digital camera.

WHICH CONNECTION?

Depending on how you want to use your camcorder, you need the following connections.

■ Television

Playing back your recordings on a TV requires the digital video to be translated into analogue signals, which means a loss of quality.

All the camcorders have a standard audio/video (AV) output and come with an AV cable you can connect to your TV. All also have a higher-quality super-video (S-video) output. But you need a TV or VCR with S-video input, and only about half of the tested camcorder models come with an S-video cable, so you'd have to buy one as an extra.

If the camcorder has AV or S-video inputs (see the table, page 35, for models), you can use it to record TV programs.

■ Computer

You can transfer your recordings digitally to your computer without loss of quality.

All the tested models except the two that record onto DVD (see *Camcorder systems*, below, for details) have a digital output: either digital video ('firewire' or DV) or Micro MV (see *Camcorder systems*). The two systems aren't compatible.

You need a fairly powerful computer and special software (provided with almost all the models) to transfer video recordings.

On models with a DV or Micro MV input (see the table for model details), you can also transfer your edited recordings from the computer back onto tape without loss of quality.

If you can't use any of the above connections, the USB port available on most models is the next best option. But the transfer is much slower and involves a loss of quality. USB is mainly used for the transfer of still photos from the memory card to the computer.

CAMCORDER SYSTEMS

If you want to buy a camcorder, you're faced with a range of different systems.

In terms of picture quality, **standard analogue** systems such as VHS or Video 8 are outdated. All standard analogue systems are available in **highband** versions (for example, S-VHS, or Hi-8). While the picture quality of these systems is significantly better than that of standard systems, it's still a far cry from digital quality.

We included (but haven't reported on) five analogue models in our test for comparative purposes, and their picture quality was clearly worse than that of even the lowest-scoring digital models. They also tend to be heavier and bulkier than digital models, and aren't even that much cheaper than entry-level digital models any more.

Digital systems offer far better picture quality, copying without quality loss, and easier, more

sophisticated editing using computer software. There are several systems:

■ **Mini DV:** This is currently the most commonly used digital format. Small cassettes allow very compact camcorders.

■ **Micro MV:** This uses cassettes that are much smaller than Mini DV ones, and different data compression. Micro MV doesn't support long-play mode, and only has one stereo audio track, whereas most of the mini DV models have two (see *What to look for: Sound*, page 34).

■ **Digital 8:** Uses the analogue Hi-8 tape (making Digital 8 models bulkier than other digital camcorders), but digital recording technology.

■ **DVD:** Uses DVD-RAM or DVD-R instead of a tape to record video and photos. A DVD-RAM can store only 36 minutes of video on the best quality setting (18 minutes on each side, and you have to turn the disk), compared to 60 minutes that can be stored on the various tape systems.

If your computer has a DVD-RAM or DVD-RAM-playable DVD-ROM drive (common on modern computers), you can play a DVD-RAM directly in your computer. If not, you can transfer the video via USB connection. Not many DVD players are able to read DVD-RAM disks.

A DVD-RAM can be rewritten many times, but is fairly expensive. Once you've edited your recordings, you can save them permanently onto a cheaper DVD-R, which can only be written to once and on one side, and can be played in a computer DVD drive or on a DVD player.

Accessing recorded scenes is much quicker than by winding a tape. And as the camcorder only uses empty disk space for recordings, there's no risk of 'taping' over existing recordings.

WHAT TO BUY

SONY DCR-IP220	\$3799
PANASONIC NV-GS70	\$3079
SONY DCR-TRV80	\$2799
SONY DCR-TRV33	\$1799

The top two are clearly the best in the test — but they're also the most expensive, and the **SONY** is a bit short on some features most other models have. You may not want to spend that much money, which is why we've included the next two in our list, although they have some weaknesses — see the *Profiles*, page 32, for details.

Profiles

Models in the *What to buy* list are profiled in rank order from left to right. Prices shown are recommended retail, as provided by manufacturers in September 2003.

SONY DCR-IP220

Price: \$3799

Good points

- By far the best video recording quality in daylight and artificial light conditions, and the best image stabiliser.
- Good built-in microphone.
- Long battery operating time.
- Low sensitivity to wind noise.
- Built-in photo flash.

Bad points

- No connection for an external microphone. Most models that can use an external one achieve better sound quality than even the best internal mike.
- No accessory shoe (see *Accessories*, far right).
- No long-play mode.
- No manual shutter speed setting.
- No external battery charger.
- Fixed viewfinder. On most other models you can adjust the viewfinder to a position that's comfortable for you (for example, by tilting it upwards).
- No time code on frames to help editing.



PANASONIC NV-GS70

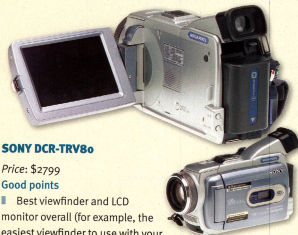
Price: \$3079

Good points

- Good picture quality in daylight and artificial light conditions.
- Best autofocus system.
- Good built-in microphone.
- Clearly the longest battery operating time.
- Very versatile.
- Built-in photo flash.

Bad points

- None to mention.



SONY DCR-TRV80

Price: \$2799

Good points

- Best viewfinder and LCD monitor overall (for example, the easiest viewfinder to use with your left eye).
- The most versatile — it's packed with features and functions.
- Built-in photo flash.
- Large monitor.

Bad points

- Internal microphone records some zoom noises.
- No manual shutter speed setting.
- No external battery charger.



SONY DCR-TRV33

Price: \$1799

Good points

- Best built-in microphone, and the best sound score.
- Low sensitivity to wind noise.

Bad points

- Short battery operating time.
- No manual shutter speed setting.
- No built-in photo flash.
- No external battery charger.

What to look for

If you think a digital camcorder is for you, consider the following before you buy:

- **Which system** do you want (see *Camcorder systems*, page 31, for the differences)? For example, if you've already used a Video 8 or Hi-8 camcorder, you may prefer one of the Digital 8 models you can play your old tapes on.
- Go to a shop and **try out** the models you're interested in. Check whether you can comfortably hold them and reach the main controls (such as the zoom) at the same time, especially if you're left-handed — most models are designed for right-hand use.

■ An **external microphone** usually provides much better sound quality than a built-in one, so if very high audio quality is important for you, make sure the camcorder you're interested in allows you to connect one.

■ A **wind filter** further improves sound quality in windy conditions.

■ If you're planning to film a lot, you may prefer a camcorder that allows you to remove the battery and charge it in a **separate charger** while you carry on filming with another battery, rather than having to hook up the whole camcorder to the power supply. That's particularly true for models with relatively short battery operating times (see the table, page 34, for recording times).

FEATURES AND FUNCTIONS

Think about which ones you need, and make sure the model you're interested in has them all. Some models are packed with features you may never use, so there's no point paying for them. The following are some of the most common ones.

Accessories

All have:

- Instruction manual.
- Lens protector.
- Rechargeable lithium-ion battery and charger.
- Remote control (except the **SHARP VL-Z1E**).
- AV cable
- USB cable (except the **CANON MV600i** and **SHARP VL-Z1E**).
- CD-ROM with data transfer and/or editing software (except the **SHARP VL-Z1E**).

In the table:

- **Accessory shoe:** Models with a tick in the table allow you to attach things like an external microphone or a video lamp to the camera.
- **Memory card** to record photos and (sometimes) video clips. Depending on the picture quality you choose and the model, you can store around five to 200 photos, or about one to seven minutes of video clips on an 8 MB card.
- **Video lamp/photo flash:** These allow you to film or take still photos in low light conditions.

Connections

■ Think about which connections to your TV and computer you'll use, and make sure the model you're interested in has them. Get all the necessary cables when buying the camcorder. For example, only AV and USB cables come standard with most of the tested models.

All have:

- Power connection.
- Audio/video (AV) and S-video output to play back recordings on your TV.
- Digital video (DV or 'firewire') output

(except the DVD-based **HITACHI DZ-MV350E** and **PANASONIC VDR-M30**) and USB connection (except the **CANON MV600i** and **SHARP VL-Z1E**) to transfer recordings to a computer for editing.

In the table:

- **Headphone output:** Headphones allow you to monitor the sound quality as it's recorded.
- **AV/S-video/DV inputs:** You can record from your TV using the AV or S-video inputs. The DV input allows you to record a video back onto tape once you've edited it on your computer.

Displays

All have:

- LCD colour monitor with adjustable brightness. They can all be swivelled to face forward, so you can easily film yourself.
- Dioptre-adjustable viewfinder. Viewfinders may be awkward to use if you're wearing glasses. This feature lets you adjust the viewfinder to your eyesight (similar to binoculars), so you can use it without your glasses.
- Time code (except the **SONY DCR-IP220**): This feature gives each picture frame an invisible digital marking that allows you to edit very accurately.

Recording functions

All have:

- One charge-coupled device (CCD), which is a chip that turns pictures into digital signals. (The **PANASONIC NV-GS70** has three — one for each primary colour.)
- Volume-adjustable built-in speaker.
- Motor zoom with variable speed, so you can zoom up and down at varying speeds by pressing a button.
- Autofocus and manual focus.
- Image stabilisation: Stabilises the picture in situations where you'd otherwise be likely to produce a shaky recording (for example, during telephoto recordings and slow pans).
- Automatic fading: This function gradually fades out picture and sound, allowing better-quality editing.
- Automatic and manual exposure setting. The manual function gives you more control over the amount of light entering the lens, and therefore more scope for creativity.
- Automatic shutter speed setting for photo recordings.
- Automatic and manual (except the **SONY DCR-PC105**, **DCR-TRV250** and **DCR-TRV355**) white



The Samsung VP-D5000 allows you to use separate lens systems for video and still photo recording. It's the only model in this test that produces still photos of a quality similar to a good digital camera.

Brand / model (in rank order)	PERFORMANCE							8 FEATURES		
	1 Overall score (%)	2 Picture quality score (%)	3 Sound quality score (%)	4 Ease of use score (%)	5 Versatility score (%)	6 Battery score (%)	7 Recording time (min)	Input for external microphone	Wind filter	Ext. batt. chg.
SONY DCR-IP220	70	71	66	65	74	80	123		✓	
PANASONIC NV-G570	69	67	68	64	83	91	146	✓	✓	✓
SONY DCR-TRV80	65	62	59	62	86	76	105	✓	✓	
SONY DCR-TRV33	64	58	73	63	82	56	73	✓	✓	
PANASONIC NV-DS65	62	57	64	66	69	63	97	✓	✓	✓
PANASONIC NV-G550	62	55	68	64	78	65	95	✓	✓	✓
SONY DCR-PC105	62	59	60	62	83	63	85	✓	✓	
CANON MVX100i	61	63	51	66	74	41	57	✓	✓	(B)
HITACHI DZ-MV350E	59	56	60	60	60	75	116	✓	✓	✓
SAMSUNG VP-DS000i	59	54	59	61	73	65	97	✓	✓	
SONY DCR-TRV355	59	53	62	59	79	57	85	✓		
CANON MV600i	58	53	62	68	61	41	64	✓	✓	(B)
CANON MV630i	57	52	54	67	71	45	72	✓	✓	(B)
PANASONIC VDR-M30	57	55	58	58	60	69	105	✓	✓	✓
SONY DCR-TRV250	57	52	61	59	66	68	103			
JVC GR-DV500E	56	53	46	61	75	60	93	✓	✓	
SHARP VL-Z7E	55	50	57	58	63	64	99		✓	
JVC GR-DX300	54	52	45	57	74	48	70		✓	
SAMSUNG VP-D21i	54	45	63	59	64	67	102	✓	✓	
SHARP VL-Z1E (A)	54	49	59	60	43	67	107		✓	



The Hitachi DZ-MV350E (pictured) and Panasonic VDR-M30 record on DVD. See Camcorder systems, page 31, for pros and cons.

balance setting. This function adjusts the camcorder to the colour 'temperature' of the environment you're filming in (for example, natural or artificial light) in order to obtain a natural colour balance. You're likely to use the manual setting only in extreme lighting situations.

■ Automatic exposure programs (at least four). These pick a certain aperture and shutter speed for standard situations such as sports or portrait photos.

■ Digital picture effects (while some models have only one effect, most have eight or more).

■ Long-play mode (except the SONY DCR-IP220). This lets you record at reduced speed so you can fit more on a video tape. However, the picture quality won't be as good.

■ Photo recording on tape and/or memory card.

■ Self-timer (except the PANASONIC NV-DS65 and SONY DCR-TRV250). Allows you to start recording after a certain time — for example, if you want to film yourself.

■ Full auto recording: Point-and-shoot function where you don't have to worry about setting anything manually.

In the table:

■ Manual shutter speed setting allows more creativity than automatic settings (which all models have) when taking photos.

■ Infrared lamp: Most models achieve fairly good picture quality even in quite poor light conditions. Models with a tick in the table have an infrared lamp that allows you to make recordings even in complete darkness. However, this only works well with objects less than about 3 m away, and produces a monochrome (black-and-white or black-and-green) picture.

Playback modes

All have:

■ Play, fast forward, rewind, stop, pause, frame-by-frame.

■ Playback search modes (for example, to search for photos on the tape, or a certain date).

Sound

All have:

■ Stereo microphone.

■ Two stereo audio tracks (except the HITACHI DZ-MV350E, PANASONIC VDR-M30 and SONY DCR-IP220, which have one), allowing you, for example, to record music and/or narration in addition to the original sound recordings.

In the table:

■ External microphone connection: See page 33.

■ Wind filter: See page 33. On the SONYs that have one, this is an automatic function; on all the others you can turn it on and off.

Remote control

■ All except the SHARP VL-Z1E (which doesn't come with a remote) have a remote that operates most playback functions plus additional functions, some of which may be available via the remote only.

							SPECIFICATIONS							
Record video clips on memory card	Video lamp / photo flash*	Headphone output	AV / S-video / DV input	Manual shutter speed setting	Night shot (IR light)	Memory card supplied (8 Mb)	9 System	10 Max. zoom factor (optical/digital)	Viewfinder	Colour monitor size (mm)	Dimensions W x H x D**	Weight (g)***	Manufacturer / distributor	Price (\$†)
✓	-/✓	✓	✓/✓/✓ (D)		✓	✓	Micro MV	10 / 120	Colour	50 x 37	10.0 x 7.5 x 14.5	645	Sony	3799
✓ (C)	-/✓	✓	✓/✓/✓	✓	(E)	✓	Mini DV	10 / 500	Colour	50 x 37	9.0 x 8.0 x 15.5	595	Panasonic	3079
✓	-/✓	✓	✓/✓/✓		✓	✓	Mini DV	10 / 120	Colour	72 x 50	8.5 x 9.0 x 17.5	845	Sony	2799
✓	-/✓	✓	✓/✓/✓		✓	✓	Mini DV	10 / 120	Colour	50 x 37	8.0 x 9.5 x 12.0	640	Sony	1799
	✓/✓	✓	-/✓/✓	✓	(E)	✓	Mini DV	10 / 500	B/W	50 x 37	6.5 x 9.0 x 13.5	530	Panasonic	1319
✓ (C)	-/✓	✓	✓/✓/✓	✓	(E)	✓	Mini DV	10 / 500	Colour	50 x 37	8.0 x 8.0 x 12.5	500	Panasonic	1539
✓	-/✓	✓	✓/✓/✓		✓	✓	Mini DV	10 / 120	Colour	50 x 37	7.0 x 10.5 x 10.5	565	Sony	2299
✓	-/✓	✓	✓/✓/✓	✓		✓	Mini DV	16 / 320	Colour	49 x 38	8.0 x 9.0 x 19.0	730	Canon	1699
	-/✓		-/✓/✓				DVD	10 / 240	Colour	50 x 37	6.5 x 9.0 x 15.5	580	Hitachi	1999
✓ (C)	-/✓	✓	✓/✓/✓	✓	✓	✓ (F)	Mini DV	10 / 800	Colour	41 x 30	11.5 x 8.5 x 14.5	780	Samsung	2499
✓	✓/✓		✓/✓/✓		✓		Digital 8	20 / 700	B/W	50 x 37	9.0 x 10.5 x 20.5	965	Sony	1029
	-/✓	✓	✓/✓/✓				Mini DV	18 / 360	Colour	49 x 38	7.0 x 10.5 x 15.5	620	Canon	999
	-/✓	✓	✓/✓/✓	✓		✓	Mini DV	20 / 400	Colour	49 x 38	7.5 x 10.5 x 15.5	625	Canon	1199
	-/✓		-/✓/✓				DVD	10 / 240	Colour	50 x 37	6.5 x 9.0 x 15.5	580	Panasonic	2309
	✓/✓		-/✓/✓		✓		Digital 8	20 / 700	B/W	50 x 37	9.0 x 10.5 x 20.5	935	Sony	869
✓ (C)	-/✓	✓	✓/✓/✓			✓	Mini DV	10 / 300	Colour	49 x 36	8.5 x 9.0 x 18.5	675	Hagemeyer	1649
	-/✓	✓	✓/✓/✓	✓		✓	Mini DV	10 / 500	Colour	50 x 38	9.0 x 9.0 x 11.0	605	Sharp	1799
✓ (C)	-/✓		✓/✓/✓			✓	Mini DV	10 / 500	B/W	60 x 45	6.5 x 10.0 x 10.5	540	Hagemeyer	2099
	✓/✓		-/✓/✓	✓	✓		Mini DV	10 / 800	B/W	50 x 37	8.0 x 9.5 x 17.0	595	Samsung	899
	-/✓	✓	-/✓/✓	✓	✓		Mini DV	10 / 500	B/W	50 x 38	9.0 x 9.0 x 11.0	570	Sharp	999

Built-in.

** Including handstrap, recording medium and battery. Rounded to the nearest 0.5 cm and 5 g.

† Recommended retail, according to manufacturer information in September 2003.

(A) The manufacturer tells us this model is similar to the VL-Z5E (\$199), which has a colour viewfinder and memory card slot (8 Mb card supplied).

(B) Optional extra.

(C) MPEG4.

(D) Micro MV.

(E) Can record colour images in complete darkness by using the light from the monitor to illuminate close objects.

(F) 16 Mb.

1 Overall score

The overall score is a combination of the following factors:

- Picture quality: 45%.
- Sound quality: 20%.
- Ease of use: 20%.
- Versatility: 10%.
- Battery score: 5%.

2 Picture quality score

The main picture quality assessments were:

- A viewing panel assessed the sharpness, colour and overall image quality of recordings in daylight and artificial light.
- A panel assessed macro recordings, and recordings made in low light conditions and – where applicable – at night.
- Resolution (picture sharpness).
- A panel assessed the quality of still photos

recorded on memory card (where applicable) or tape.

■ A panel assessed the quality of the autofocus system during normal recording and recording under poor light conditions.

■ On all the tested models you can activate a function that stabilises the picture in situations where you'd otherwise be likely to produce a shaky recording (for example, during telephoto recordings and slow pans). We checked how well the function works, and whether the stabilising effect has any negative impact on picture quality.

3 Sound quality score

A panel assessed the quality of speech and music recorded with the built-in and an external microphone (on models that have a standard connection for one). We also looked at the recorders' sensitivity to wind noise.

4 Ease of use score

A user panel assessed the instructions, the ease of various recording and playback functions, the quality and functionality of the viewfinder, LCD monitor and remote control, the portability of the camcorder, and data transfer to a computer. We also measured the time delay between switching the recorder on and being able to use it, and the so-called gap time (time gap between successive recordings after the camcorder's been switched off).

5 Versatility score

We assessed the cameras against a list of about 50 features and functions.

6 Battery score

We measured how long the camcorders' batteries lasted using recording and playback test cycles simulating typical user behaviour.

7 Recording time

The camcorders were set to full-auto recording mode, with the monitor, autofocus and image stabiliser switched on. Every five minutes the zoom was operated three times across the whole range and back, until the battery was empty and the camcorder switched off.

8 Features

See *What to look for* and *Features and functions*, page 33, for explanations of these and other features.

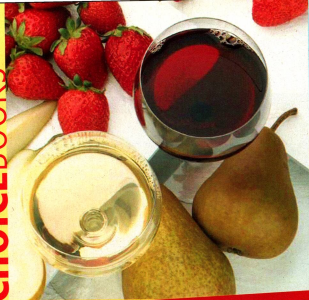
9 System

See *Camcorder systems*, page 31, for an explanation of the differences.

10 Maximum zoom factor (optical/digital)

The optical zoom factor describes what you're used to from photo cameras. The higher the factor, the bigger the zoom range. Within the limits of the lens, using the optical zoom won't decrease picture quality, and you can stabilise the picture with the image stabiliser.

With the digital zoom you can select a part of the picture and enlarge it digitally. The more you enlarge, the grainier the picture gets. So while a digital zoom factor of 500 or more may sound impressive, don't expect a sharp recording of that far-away bird – your recording will look as if it's taken from a spy satellite.



**All CHOICE Books
are 10% cheaper than
normal retail**

The CHOICE Wine Buying Guide 2004

CHOICE selects 453
of the best value wines
Australia drinks



PETER CEREXHE

NEW

**Buy any 3 books from us
and they're postage-free!**

That's right, buy 3 or more books from us and
we'll waive the \$6 postage and handling charge.

THE CHOICE WINE BUYING GUIDE 2004

*CHOICE selects 453 of the best-value wines
Australia drinks*

Peter Cerexhe

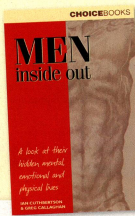
This year we've tested 453 of the most widely available wines in Australia. In typical CHOICE style, each wine was tasted 'blind' — the panel of 16 experts couldn't see the bottles, so you know the results are truly independent and unbiased.

The CHOICE Wine Buying Guide 2004 is the result of the most comprehensive wine test ever conducted by CHOICE. You'll be amazed at the results: for example, there are some great medal quality wines on the market for under \$15. We didn't include boutique or difficult-to-find wines, so most of them should be available at your local bottle shop.

This indispensable 264-page guide includes a photo of each wine label, a description including vintage, grape variety, price and tasting notes, and a score out of 20. The eight-page colour section features the 15 wines specially recommended for their high scores and excellent value for money.

Now in its third year, *The CHOICE Wine Buying Guide 2004* has established itself as a totally independent and reliable guide, and this year there's a special early release for CHOICE subscribers. The book will be available to you only from December 8, 2003 — it won't be in bookshops until January 2004. So order now to ensure a Christmas gift copy!

\$30.00 CODE: WG04



MEN INSIDE OUT

Do you want to know more about your partner's physical and emotional life? This will help you to find out. "A very accessible book and, importantly, written in a relaxed style that should appeal to young men as well as, hopefully, their fathers." *The West Australian*.

\$22.50 CODE: MEN



OUR HOME

Record all the details about your home in one easily accessible place in this new, soft-cover edition.

\$13.50 CODE: OUR2

THE SEVEN AGES OF MONEY

The *Australian's* Tim Blue examines what your financial needs might be at any stage of your life, and offers tips towards achieving future financial independence.

\$22.50 CODE: SAM

THE HARD WORD

The best examples of outrageous claims, misleading ads and misadventures in marketing, including many that couldn't fit onto the back page of CHOICE.

\$10.00 CODE: HDWD

THE REAL ESTATE ROOKIE

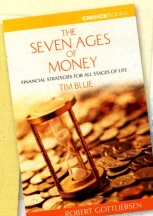
As property markets boom everyone wants a slice of the action, but where do first-time investors get unbiased, sensible and practical advice? In this book! It has a bounty of advice and hints to help buyers make the best decisions. Reprinted twice in its first month!

\$18.00 CODE: RER

SYDNEY FOR KIDS

Over 300 fun places to take the kids during the Christmas holidays. Now only \$15.

\$15.00 CODE: SFK2



FOOD GLORIOUS FOOD

The big picture: the theory and practice behind healthy eating. "Explains how healthy food can be scrumptious... helps readers understand nutrition and what a balanced diet really means." *The Daily Telegraph*.

\$22.50 CODE: FGF

BUT WHY ME?

With so many people being retrenched every year, psychologist David West's book on facing up to and coping with redundancy is both long overdue and timely. If you've fallen prey, there's hope. This book offers guidance on refocusing your life, whether by getting fair payout entitlements or finding another position.

\$20.00 CODE: BWME

BAT & PAD

Cricket, the summer game! Enjoy some of the best writing on Australian cricket as you savour a glass of one of the wines recommended in our new *Wine Guide*. Or buy a copy for the cricket lover in your family for a special \$15.

\$15.00 CODE: B&P

FOOD PRESERVING AT HOME

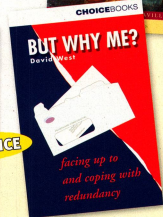
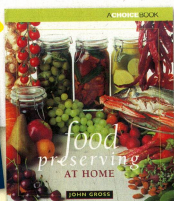
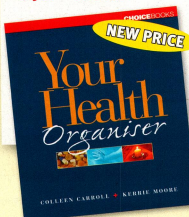
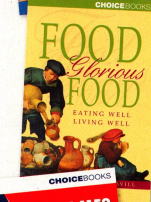
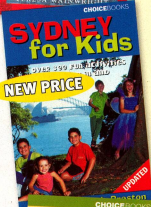
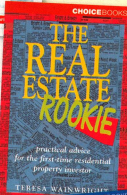
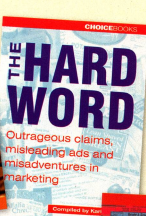
Take full advantage of the great range of seasonal produce available by preserving them when they're at their peak. This practical and easy-to-follow guide offers a range of preserving options from smoking, drying and freezing to pickling and canning.

\$26.10 CODE: FPAH

YOUR HEALTH ORGANISER

When your doctor asks, "Have you ever had...?" do your eyes roll back in your head? Remembering when you took something, what your blood pressure was or even if you've had measles can be a headache, so write it all down in this handy record book. Now available for a special \$10!

\$10.00 CODE: YHO



A fridge to go

You need to know your stuff when choosing a portable fridge — read on.

AUSTRALIAN PICTURE LIBRARY

So you're looking for a fridge that can run from your car battery, preferably as well as via a normal electricity connection. You might even be after a model that can run off LP gas, or perhaps you just want to keep drinks cool while you're travelling without messing about with ice or freezer bricks.

There are three types of portable fridge to choose from — thermoelectric, compressor and absorption — with big differences between them. We put eight chest-style models to the test.

You need to know what you'll use the fridge for to choose the right type and then the right model. Check out the scenarios (pages 40–42) to find which matches you best. Then read about the general characteristics of the type of fridge for your scenario and the particular pros and cons of each model. You'll also need to bear in mind the following factors when you're choosing.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

■ **Type:** If you want to be able to run the fridge on gas, you'll need an absorption model. If you only need to run it off the car battery or electricity, a compressor or maybe a thermoelectric one might suit your needs — see the scenarios to find out which. If you choose a compressor model and want to be able to operate it from 240 V, check whether it comes with an adaptor or you have to buy it as an extra.

■ **Compartments:** Think about what you're likely to put in it, and whether you need a fridge or freezer or a model that can be both at the same time.

■ **Size:** The fridge needs to fit in your car with enough space around it for ventilation and still leave room for your bags and so on. Check the storage volume and whether it'll hold all you're likely to want to put in it. If you'll need to move it around, check how much its weight will add to that of the load inside.

■ Temperature zones and evaporator position:

Check the location of the evaporator or cooling surface, as any air above it is likely to be warmer. Read the instructions to see if there are different temperature zones or compartments.

■ **Battery drain:** If you're likely to run the fridge often when your battery isn't being charged, find out how much current it'll draw. Five amps is quite high, one amp quite low. Also consider inbuilt battery protection if you'll be using the main car battery to run the fridge — look for a model that cuts out and in again at a fairly high voltage to prevent the battery going flat. Alternatively, run the fridge off a second battery. Thermal covers are available for extra insulation, which may help conserve battery power.

■ **Off-road use:** Make sure the manufacturer recommends the product for this use, and that it has good tie-down points and can handle hills. You could also consider shock-minimisation options for the fridge, such as a foam base for it to sit on.

■ **Controls:** Check how easy they are to set initially, and to adjust as conditions change in order to maintain the right temperature.

■ **Baskets:** Removable baskets may be easier to use than one deep compartment that you have to reach into and search for things.

IN A NUTSHELL

■ **None of the models tested stood out as being the complete package, but the compressor models are probably the best option for most people. Most people who responded to our request for experiences with a portable fridge (in the September issue) owned a compressor model, and most were happy with it.**

■ **For short trips you're probably just as well off using a cooler with ice bricks as the thermoelectric models on test — two in particular don't stay cool enough to store food, especially when the external temperature is warm.**

Which type for you?

COMPRESSOR MODELS

These models operate in the same way as your fridge at home. They run on a 12 V battery or from 240 V AC mains electricity, usually by using an adaptor. Unfortunately only the **ENGEL** comes equipped to run from mains or battery — for the **BUSHMAN**, **EVAKOOL** and **WAECO CF-40** you need to buy an AC adaptor (see the table, page 43, for prices).

On the whole, the compressor models worked better than the thermoelectric or absorption ones. They stay cold under a wide range of ambient temperatures, and are much less of a drain on a car battery during normal running.

One problem we found is setting the temperature and maintaining it once the ambient temperature changes — food can freeze or become too warm if you don't change it. Some models were much better than others for this — see the table and profiles for details.



BUSHMAN SC-35

(we tested it with the optional high lid, making it the **SC-42**)

Price: \$946

Fridge or freezer

It's a capable freezer in 32°C ambient temperature and can still maintain well below zero (−7°C) in 43°C (a normal freezer temperature is −15°C to −18°C). It cools to the required temperature quite quickly. During normal running it draws a relatively low average current.

The compressor cuts out when the voltage gets low, but at a stage when the battery would probably already have drained too much to start your car — it'd be better for a dual battery set-up. If it's on a steep slope in one direction it may stop operating until it's back to a near level position.

Its electronic controls are easy to use and have a display for easy setting. The digital temperature setting is in handy 1°C steps, but isn't accurate in all conditions. It also has an indicator that shows whether the compressor is running. Folding, open handles allow for tying down, and it has convenient baskets, but it's a bit heavy and the folding handles can squeeze your knuckles.

Scenario

The Marshall family like to hit the road as often as they can and find a spot to pitch their tent. They sometimes stay in caravan parks or camping grounds with powered sites, but not always, so they've set their car up with a dual battery system and wired a compressor fridge into the second battery, which provides power to the fridge without causing car-starting hassles. George is also a keen fisherman and uses the fridge to store his bait — and hopefully the big haul from his fishing trips.

ENGEL MT45F-G4

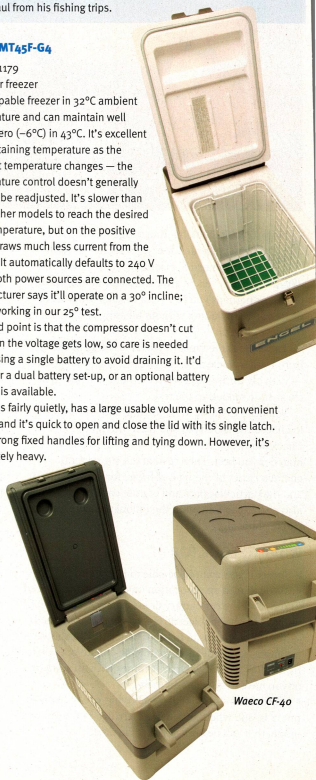
Price: \$1179

Fridge or freezer

It's a capable freezer in 32°C ambient temperature and can maintain well below zero (−6°C) in 43°C. It's excellent at maintaining temperature as the ambient temperature changes — the temperature control doesn't generally need to be readjusted. It's slower than some other models to reach the desired cold temperature, but on the positive side it draws much less current from the battery. It automatically defaults to 240 V when both power sources are connected. The manufacturer says it'll operate on a 30° incline; it kept working in our 25° test.

A bad point is that the compressor doesn't cut out when the voltage gets low, so care is needed when using a single battery to avoid draining it. It'd be OK for a dual battery set-up, or an optional battery monitor is available.

It runs fairly quietly, has a large usable volume with a convenient basket, and it's quick to open and close the lid with its single latch. It has strong fixed handles for lifting and tying down. However, it's moderately heavy.



Waeco CF-40

EVAKOOL RF47

Price: \$999

Fridge, freezer or both (you can move or completely remove the compartment divider to suit your needs), but not very good as a fridge alone because some areas can still be below freezing.

The freezer reaches a good temperature under all tested ambient conditions, but at 43°C the fresh-food compartment is slightly too warm and its temperature can vary considerably with ambient temperature change. It's very quick to cool to the desired temperature in the freezer compartment. It draws a relatively low average current, though more than the other compressor models. It has the choice of economy or boost mode, which makes the compressor operate at a higher speed if, say, you want to cool food faster.

The compressor cuts out when the voltage gets low, but at a stage when the battery may have drained too much to start your car. It'd be better for a dual battery set-up.

It has a fault indicator and folding handles for lifting and tying down. On the downside, the temperature control doesn't have graduations, so there are no marks to guide you when readjusting it to maintain a constant temperature as ambient conditions change. It's also a bit heavy and awkward to carry as the compressor unit is attached in a separate housing on the side.

WAECO CF-40

Price: \$849

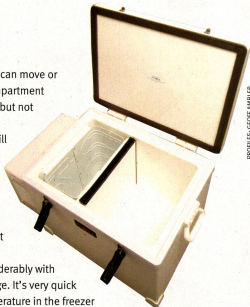
Fridge or freezer

It's a capable freezer in 32°C ambient temperatures, and still maintains well below zero (-10°C) in 43°C. It's also quick to cool to the desired temperature. However, only seven temperature settings are available, with increments of 5°C. This means there's a limited choice of settings to readjust to if conditions change — for example, the closest setting to a normal fridge temperature in 32°C gave around 1°C. In addition, the main compartment doesn't have its cooling surfaces all the way to the top. This plus a separate section that's warmer means the volume of the effective cool area is less than the total volume.

It draws a relatively low average current, although higher when on its coldest setting, and particularly when turbo cooling. The manufacturer says it'll run on a 30° incline; it kept working in our 25° test.

It has three battery protection options to prevent the battery draining too much to start the car. For example, on the 'high' setting the fridge will stop drawing power while the battery still has most of its charge remaining. It's the best compressor model for a single-battery set-up.

Electronic pushbutton controls make setting easy, and it has strong fixed handles for lifting and tying down. Unfortunately on our sample the lid didn't always latch closed properly.



ABSORPTION MODEL

Scenario

The Princes are serious campers, who like nothing better than to spend time every so often in fairly remote locations. They find an absorption fridge best suits their needs — they get everything cold first on 240 V at home, then run the fridge/freezer off the car battery while getting to their destination, and then off LP gas once there. If they're travelling on rough and hilly roads it doesn't work very well, but it's better than nothing, and it works well once they've stopped and have set it up level.

If you're keen to connect to gas, an absorption model is your only option. This style of fridge has been around for many years; it doesn't have a motor but relies on the cooling effect of a liquid (in this case ammonia) when it evaporates into a gas. For this it needs to be level and to have a heat source, which can be from a car battery, mains electricity or LP gas. Being able to use gas as the power source makes it handy for camping for prolonged periods in more remote locations.

We found just one chest-style model with a capacity of 40–50 L (similar to the compressor models tested).

CHESCOLD DOMETIC COMBI BOX RC1180

Price: \$1266

Fridge, freezer or both

It operates well as a fridge/freezer in 32°C, but in higher temperatures (43°C in our test) it isn't as effective as either. It doesn't maintain internal temperatures well when the ambient temperature changes — food can freeze or become too warm if you don't change the fridge/freezer's temperature. When running on 12 V it only operates on fully cold mode, but you'd only run it off the car battery when driving. It draws a very high current on 12 V and requires special wiring for most vehicles.

It doesn't work well at an angle, even a very small one, and being moved or bumped can affect it too. It's therefore not realistically going to operate at all times while you're driving. Because it doesn't have a motor it's almost silent when running, but it does give off considerable heat.

A screwdriver or other tool is needed to disconnect the DC connection, and it doesn't have open handles or points to tie it down. It's also moderately heavy and quite bulky.



THERMOELECTRIC MODELS

A thermoelectric system (very basically) produces heat or cold at a junction of dissimilar metal conductors where a current is flowing. However, 'fridge' would be a misnomer for this type of portable cooler/warmer, and they're certainly not freezers — they're really designed for short-term refrigeration or keeping warm. While they generally have a limited cooling ability, they're still a substantial drain on the car battery (almost 5 amps) — disconnect them when you turn off your engine. They're quite noisy, and are about the size of a small insulated cooler.

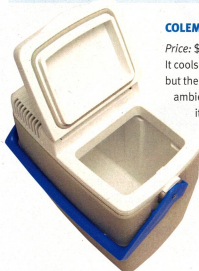
We can't recommend any of the models for their claimed ability to keep food warm, as none of them maintained a temperature that's adequate to store hot food safely (tested in an ambient temperature of 10°C). The **WAECO** was the only one that came close, reaching almost 60°C — still not quite outside the food danger zone of 5–60°C.

As for their cooling abilities, neither the **MOTOGARD** nor **COLEMAN** was able to cool to an adequate temperature once the ambient temperature got to about 25°C or so, which isn't unusual inside a car even in winter. In summer, when you're more likely to use a cooler in the car, the temperature will be much hotter, so an insulated cooler with ice or ice bricks may in fact be more effective for a few hours at least. (Don't be tempted to add ice to your thermoelectric cooler — manufacturers warn against it.) The **WAECO** model performed much better at warmer external temperatures — at 32°C it stayed around 5°C inside, but all these models were much warmer than refrigeration temperatures at 43°C ambient temperature.

The **WAECO** model is the pick of this group, particularly if you live in an area where the temperature is fairly mild. For hotter areas, none of the models is recommended for more than keeping drinks somewhat cool, or for a quick trip to the shops to keep perishables cooler than the ambient temperature.

Scenario

The Marriott family spend their weekends driving from one sports ground to the next, following the sporting endeavours of their three children, and they find a thermoelectric fridge suits their needs. They live in a temperate area and like to have cool water in the car for the kids to drink. They also live 20 minutes out of town and like the convenience of storing their milk and other perishables in the fridge for the trip from the shop to home.

**COLEMAN 5615-807**

Price: \$249

It cools to around 20°C below the ambient temperature, but the temperature inside tends to increase when the ambient temperature does, becoming quite warm once it gets above 25°C. The keep-warm mode isn't hot enough for safe storage of hot food at 10°C ambient temperature.

While it's small, light and easy to use, it runs continuously while cooling, drawing a current above 4 amps, and it's fairly noisy.

MOTOGARD CAR COOL MG5C743

Price: \$100

It cools to around 20°C below the ambient temperature, but the temperature inside tends to increase when the ambient temperature does, becoming quite warm once it gets above 25°C. The keep-warm mode isn't hot enough for safe storage of hot food at 10°C ambient temperature.

While it's small, light and easy to use, it's noticeably loud and annoying when running — and it runs continuously while cooling, drawing a current above 4 amps. Water drips to the outside when it's turned off if frost has formed. It has a good lid latching mechanism.



PERFORMANCE

Brand / model (in alphabetical order within groups)	Type	1 Coldest temperature reached in 20°C (°C)	1 Coldest temperature reached in 32°C (°C)	1 Coldest temperature reached in 43°C (°C)	2 Cool-down time (hr:min)	3 Temperature variation when ambient changes 10–43°C (°C)	4 Battery protection cut-out / cut-in	5 Battery average while all tests
COMPRESSOR MODELS: 12 / 24 V DC or 240 V AC								
BUSHMAN SC-35 (A)	Fridge or freezer	-18	-15	-7	1:40	2.4	(L)	1.0 / 3.0
ENGEL MT45F-G4	Fridge or freezer	-18	-16	-6	2:11	0.3		1.1 / 2.7
EVAKOOL RF47 (B)	Fridge, freezer or both (C)	-23 / -5 (D)	-25 / -2 (D)	-19 / +7 (D)	0:53 (G)	7.1 (out) / 13.2 (in) (K)	(L)	2.0 / 2.6
WAECO CF-40	Fridge or freezer	-17	-17	-10	1:00 (H)	2.6	✓	1.0 / 4.0
ABSORPTION MODEL: Three-way (gas, 240 V AC and 12 V DC)								
CHESOLD DOMETIC Combi Box RC1180	Fridge, freezer or both	-15 (-22 / -10) (E)	-6 (-14 / -1) (E) (F)	+6 (-3 / +13) (E) (F) (J)		6.4 (out) / 14.9 (in) (K)		11.5 / 17
THERMOELECTRIC MODELS: 12 V DC								
COLEMAN 5615-807	Cooler / warmer	+3	+14	+23	(J)	20.3		4.3 / 4.3
MOTOGARD Car Cool MG5C743	Cooler / warmer	+3	+15	+25	(J)	31.6		4.7 / 4.7
WAECO Tropicool Classic TC18	Cooler / warmer	+5	+5	+15	(J)	14.6		4.6 / 4.6

WAECO TROPICOL CLASSIC TC18

Price: \$199

It can maintain heat of almost 60°C in keep-warm mode, which isn't hot enough to safely store most hot foods, but will keep them warmer than the other thermoelectric models for a short while. It can maintain cool temperatures up to an ambient temperature of 32°C,

but when it goes above that the temperature in the cooler warms above 5°C.

It's small, light and easy to use, but generally runs continuously while cooling and draws a current above

4 amps. It's moderately noisy.



1 Coldest temperatures reached

Tests used a nominal 13.8 V DC, which relates to a car battery being charged while driving, except the CHESOLD, which was tested on 240 V AC (except where footnoted) because its 12 V mode is only for transport. The temperature was measured in the centre at mid-height from the bottom to the lip of lid.

2 Cool-down time

This is the time taken for the empty box to cool from 40°C down to 0°C in an ambient temperature of 43°C.

3 Temperature variation when ambient temperature changes

This is how much the internal temperature varies when the ambient temperature changes between 10°C and 43°C, when initially set as close as possible to 3°C in 32°C.

4 Battery protection

Battery protection means the fridge cuts out when the battery voltage falls so that the battery isn't fully drained. The compressor should cut back in at a higher voltage. Some manufacturers can alter the cut out/in voltage at the customer's request.

5 Battery current drawn

The DC current drawn using 13.8 V with the unit set as close as it can get to 3°C in 32°C: 'average cycle' includes on and off times; 'while cooling' is the typical current drawn while the compressor is running. 'Max. all tests' is approximately the highest current recorded at any time during all cooling tests, rounded to 1 amp.

6 Passed 25° incline test

Operation of the fridge at an angle of 25° — to simulate it operating on a hill — without any problems observed.

7 Noise

The sound was measured with the unit elevated and the sound meter 1 m from its front or side, whichever was the loudest. 35 dB and below is fairly quiet, 46 dB and above is noisy.

8 Price of AC power adaptor

An adaptor allows operation from mains power, converting 240 V AC to low-voltage DC. For most of the models tested it's an optional extra. It may be cheaper to buy it as a package with the fridge.

* Weight of the empty unit without cords or accessories (rounded to the nearest kg if over 10 kg).

** Including side handles and protrusions. All the models need space around them for air to circulate.

† This is the basic warranty; check for full conditions.

†† Prices are recommended retail, as provided by distributors in September/October 2003.

na Not currently available.

(A) We tested the SC-35 with an optional high lid (SC-42).

(B) The model we tested has been replaced by a new one, which has cosmetic changes only.

(C) But it doesn't work well as a fridge alone — see page 41.

(D) Freezer/fridge.

(E) The first number is for the single compartment; the numbers in brackets are for the freezer/fridge with the divider in place.

(F) When tested on gas and 12 V it achieved similar results to 240 V in 32°C but warmer in 43°C.

(G) This is the cool-down time for the freezer section; the fresh-food section is much slower (2 hr 54 min).

(H) For the main compartment only (there's also a small dairy compartment).

(I) These models can't reach 0°C in this test.

(K) Measured with their compartment dividers out and in.

(L) Cuts out as voltage drops, but at a point where the battery could already be well drained.

(M) Can operate on a 25° incline, but in a certain direction may be limited to 15°.

(N) Virtually silent: uses heat to operate, not a motor, but gives off considerable heat.

(P) Loud and very noticeable.

(Q) Has a temperature display and settings from 10°C to -22°C by 1°C steps.

(R) Has seven settings (approx. 5°C per step).

(S) Compressor made in Germany.

		SPECIFICATIONS								
6 Passed 25° incline test	7 Noise (dB)	Temperature controls	Claimed gross volume (L, freezer / fridge)	Weight (kg)*	Dimensions overall (H x W x D, cm)**	Warranty (years)†	Origin	Manufacturer / distributor	8 AC adaptor price (\$)	Price (\$††)
(M)	38	Electronic (Q)	42	21	47 x 74 x 41	3	China	DP Refrigeration	75	946
✓	35	Rotary	40	24	51 x 73 x 37	3	Thailand	Engel	Inbuilt	1179
✓	38	Rotary	47 (22 / 25)	18	43 x 72 x 46	1	Australia	Evakoool / Nexberg	139	999
✓	33	Electronic (R)	38.5	16	45 x 71 x 37	3	China (S)	Waeco	99	849
(N)		Rotary	50 (16 / 30)	25	52 x 67 x 52	1	Hungary	Dometic (Electrolux)	Inbuilt	1266
✓	46	None	15	3.4	37 x 39 x 28	1	USA	Coleman	129	249
✓	62 (P)	None	18	4.6	40 x 44 x 31	1	China	Repco	na	100
✓	48	Slide	18	5.3	39 x 44 x 31	1	China	Waeco	79	199



IN A NUTSHELL

- All the petrol lawnmowers we tested did a great job cutting grass, but three weren't as good as the others for mulching.
- An environmentally friendly battery-powered lawnmower compared well for performance with the petrol models (see page 47).

WHAT TO BUY

VICTA Mustang Mulch or Catch MCA401K	\$629
ROVER Durable Mulch 'N Catch 03291	TEST BUY \$519
ROVER Mulch 'N Catch 35M92	\$629
VICTA Commando Mulch or Catch CMS401K	TEST BUY \$549

WORTH CONSIDERING

ENVIROMOWER Eco 500	\$649
---------------------	-------

The battery-powered **ENVIROMOWER** is a great choice if you're environmentally motivated: it works nearly as well as the petrol models and creates a lot less pollution (see page 47 for a detailed review).

Hungry for GRASS

Can petrol lawnmowers do a good mulching job too?

A lawnmower with a mulching plug or adaptor is designed to allow the mower blades to finely chop up the cut grass and blow it back down, forcing the grass clippings deep into the lawn — no more unsightly strips of chopped-up grass or constantly emptying the grass catcher.

If you want a model that mulches the grass you'll be paying a bit more than for a mower that just cuts it (\$500–\$700 for our tested models), so you want to be sure it'll do the job well. We tested eight four-stroke petrol mulcher mowers to find out if you get what you pay for.

One benefit of mulching while you mow is that the finely chopped grass produces nutrients for your lawn as it decomposes, which should reduce your fertiliser use. Mulching can also reduce the amount of water your lawn needs because it reduces evaporation — good news if you live in a relatively dry area.

Most manufacturers say you shouldn't try to mulch very long grass. To get the best results there, use the catcher or mow in steps, reducing the cutting height between cuts. And mulching long, wet grass, particularly in a humid climate, may not be advisable anyway — it's thought to increase the risk of your lawn getting fungal diseases.

A FINE CUT

Testing the mowers with their catchers fitted (except in long grass) showed little difference between them for normal cutting — all of them did an excellent job cutting short, medium and long grass.

Despite being able to cope with cutting anything thrown at them in a suburban backyard, though, not all the mowers were created equal when it came to mulching.

The two **MASPORT** models and the **SUPASWIFT** left a row of grass on the surface of the lawn, which became more noticeable as the grass got longer. All the other models scored 100% for mulching short to medium-length grass. So if you're buying a mower specifically to mulch, don't pick those three.

Not much separated the mowers for ease of use: none was very difficult to use but, as the scores show, none was perfect.

Profiles

Models in the *What to buy* list are profiled from left to right. Prices are recommended or average retail, as supplied by manufacturers in September 2003.



VICTA MUSTANG MULCH OR CATCH
MCA401K

Price: \$629

GOOD POINTS

- Excellent at cutting and mulching.
- Equal best for ease of use.
- Catcher has adjustable air vents.

BAD POINTS

- Nothing to speak of.



ROOVER DURABLE MULCH 'N CATCH 03291

Price: \$519

GOOD POINTS

- Excellent at cutting and mulching.
- Adjustable handle height.

BAD POINTS

- Equal worst model for vibration.

BEST BUY



ROOVER MULCH 'N CATCH 35M92

Price: \$629

GOOD POINTS

- Excellent at cutting and mulching.
- Equal easiest to convert from catcher to mulcher mode.
- Angle of mower can be adjusted for better mulching/catching.
- Adjustable handle height.
- Equal best for ease of use.

BAD POINTS

- Nothing to speak of.



VICTA COMMANDO MULCH OR CATCH
CMS401K

Price: \$549

GOOD POINTS

- Excellent at cutting and mulching.
- Catcher has adjustable air vents.

BAD POINTS

- Equal worst model for vibration.

BEST BUY

WHAT ABOUT THE REST?

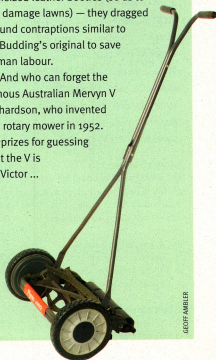
- The **YARD-MAN** was slightly let down by its comparatively low ease of use. Specifically, it's difficult to adjust this mower's cutting height.
- The two **MASPORT** models were the worst for mulching.
- The **SUPASWIFT**'s cutting height was comparatively hard to adjust and fitting its mulching adaptor was more difficult than on other models. It was also let down by its mulching performance.

THANKS TO MESSRS BUDDING AND RICHARDSON

In 1830 an English engineer, Edwin Budding, achieved a world first — a patent for a “machine for mowing lawns, etc”. His machine was much like the person-powered push-type mower that's increasingly coming back into fashion today.

Another lawnmower milestone of sorts was the use of horses wearing oversized leather booties (so as to not damage lawns) — they dragged around contraptions similar to Mr Budding's original to save human labour.

And who can forget the famous Australian Mervyn V Richardson, who invented the rotary mower in 1952. No prizes for guessing that the V is for Victor...



GEORGE AMBLER

A brighter shade of green

You may not realise it, but powered garden equipment is a significant source of photochemical smog. Two-stroke mowers, in particular, aren't good for the environment. To create mechanical power, they burn a mixture of oil and petrol and produce a lot of smoke.

Four-stroke mowers like those tested are

better choices. They emit around half the carbon monoxide and one-tenth of the hydrocarbons that two-stroke mowers produce.

Electric mowers are greener than petrol-powered ones, but even better for the environment (and great exercise for you) is the push or reel mower.

To reduce the environmental impact of your mowing, take these steps:

- Avoid fuel spills — these are thought to account for a surprisingly large proportion of lawnmower-associated air pollution.
- Keep your lawnmower in good shape. Regular maintenance includes keeping blades sharp, cleaning the underside of the mower, maintaining the proper ratio of petrol to oil (two-stroke mowers) and changing the oil when recommended (four-stroke mowers).
- Reduce the time spent mowing. Strategies include preparing the yard before mowing by moving obstacles out of the way, growing low-maintenance turf or other slow-growing grasses, and planting extra trees and shrubs to reduce lawn area.



GETTY IMAGES

Brand / model (in rank order)	PERFORMANCE					SPECIFICATIONS	
	1 Overall score (%)	2 Cutting performance score (%)	3 Cutting appearance score (%)	4 Mulching appearance score (%)	5 Ease of use score (%)	Noise at 7.5m / user's position (dB)*	6 Cutting positions / 6 Cutting height range (cm)
VICTA Mustang Mulch or Catch MCA401K	88	97	100	100	73	74 / 87	13 15–70
ROVER Durable Mulch 'N' Catch 03291	87	97	100	100	69	75 / 88	9 15–65
ROVER Mulch 'N' Catch 35M92	87	93	100	100	73	73 / 87	12 20–90
VICTA Commando Mulch or Catch CMS401K	87	93	100	100	71	71 / 87	13 5–65
YARD-MAN Mulch 'N' Catch 404X	85	97	100	100	64	74 / 89	9 10–65
MASPORT Combo 2 n 1 Multi Feature	81	97	100	60	71	72 / 85	10 15–70
MASPORT Combo 3 n 1 Multi Feature	80	97	100	60	68	71 / 86	10 15–70
SUPASWIFT 767 SMC Ultra Mulch + Catch	78	97	100	65	63	72 / 86	12 10–70

1 Overall score

The overall score is a combination of cutting performance, appearance after cutting and mulching, and ease of use scores, weighted as follows:

- Cutting performance: 26%
- Cutting appearance: 17%
- Mulching appearance: 17%
- Ease of use: 40%

2 Cutting performance score

This score included assessments of cutting short and medium to long

grass with the catcher fitted, and long grass without it.

3 Cutting appearance score

We rated the appearance of short and medium grass after mowing.

4 Mulching appearance score

We rated the lawn's appearance after mulching short and medium to long grass.

5 Ease of use score

The following were weighted equally:

- Vibration.
- Manoeuvring and pushing.
- Controls.
- Cutting height adjustment.
- Starting.
- The catcher.
- Handle comfort.
- Ease of converting from catcher to mulcher.

6 Cutting positions/cutting height range

By adjusting the height of the mower's blade above the grass you set the length

of grass to be cut. These columns show both the number of positions available and the range of approximate lengths of grass you can cut to. It's not easy changing this on some models (see *What about the rest?* on page 45).

The cutting heights shown aren't the exact length of grass you'll get, as we measured the distance between the blade and the bottom of the wheels, but it gives you an idea of the differences between models. If your lawn is very overgrown, a mower with a very low maximum height will probably have more trouble cutting it.

What to look for

- An adjustable and comfortable turned-up handle.
- Easy-to-operate throttle control located on the handlebar for quick and easy access.
- A starter cord anchored to the handle may cause some shoulder or back strain. Look for one located on the engine for an easier pull.
- A large number of cutting positions with a good range.
- Easy to change the cutting height using one lever that acts on all four wheels.
- A rigid plastic catcher rather than the bag type, which

can let grass-dust blow all over the user. The catcher should also have two handles: one for carrying, the other for easy emptying.

- If you can, turn the mower on in the shop: it shouldn't be too noisy or vibrate too much.
- Easy to push and manoeuvre.
- A wash nozzle on top of the housing for easy cleaning underneath.
- Easy to maintain and change oil/air filter/spark plugs.
- Easy conversion from catcher to mulcher mower.



Battery-powered mowing

It's finally come of age. Our testers were pleasantly surprised by the performance of the battery-powered **ENVIROMOWER Eco 500**, compared with battery mowers they'd tested in the past that simply didn't last the backyard distance.

Its power source is two lead-acid batteries connected in series to supply 24 V to a 500 W motor. It takes around 12 hours for a full recharge or three to five hours for about

a 75% charge. And the manufacturer claims that even using electricity generated from brown coal to charge it, it's a minimum 85% less polluting than a petrol mower.

Our testers found this mower would have no trouble coping with the demands of a typical suburban backyard. A single charge lasted two hours and was able to cut 3200 sq m of short grass. On long grass the power lasted for one hour and cut 1000 sq m.

While it was less powerful than the petrol mowers tested, it didn't do a bad job in long grass and its mulching performance was better than the three lowest-ranked petrol mowers. When tested in the same way as the petrol mowers its overall score was 76% — the petrol mowers ranged from 78–88%.

In terms of ease of use, big pluses are that it's very easy to start, easy to push and manoeuvre and suffers from very little vibration. And it's very quiet. On the downside, its handle may be too low for tall people, its cutting height adjustment requires a bit of effort, and changing it from a catcher mower to a mulcher mower requires a spanner and removal of the blades.

At \$649 it's comparable in cost to a mulcher mower.

■ The verdict? It's particularly suitable if you'd like to use a more environmentally friendly mower, and as long as you mow your lawns regularly its performance should satisfy most people. Contact the manufacturer on 1800 468 476 for where to buy it, or go to www.enviromower.com.au.

Weight (kg)**	Warranty (years)	Origin	Manufacturer / distributor	Price (\$)*
27.0	2	Australia	Victa Lawncare	629
28.0	1 (A)	Australia	Rover Mowers	519
28.0	1 (A)	Australia	Rover Mowers	629
27.5	2	Australia	Victa Lawncare	549
27.5	2	NZ	MTD Products	669
26.5	(B)	NZ	Masport	599
27.0	(B)	NZ	Masport	679
25.5	2 (C)	Australia	Allpower Industries	690

* As a catcher mower. Generally 1 or 2 dB quieter as a mulcher.

** Mower only; doesn't include catcher or mulcher attachment; rounded to the nearest 0.5 kg.

† Prices are the recommended or average retail price, as supplied by manufacturers in September 2003.

(A) One year for the mower, two years for the motor.

(B) Housing six years, motor two years, catcher 'lifetime', all other parts two years.

(C) For the motor; not stated for the mower.

recalls&bans

Nowadays there are so many product recalls we may not be able to print all of them in *CHOICE*. For comprehensive recall information go to the Federal Treasury website: www.recalls.gov.au. If you don't have web access, call the **Consumer Safety Unit** on (02) 6263 2747.

Companies often rent 1800 numbers for a couple of months after a recall is announced. If the number given is no longer operating, phone the manufacturer or retailer direct.

FOOD: Mrs Quick Foods has recalled **Unbaked Premium Pork Sausage**

Rolls, 750 g, all use-by dates up to and including 6 12 03; **Unbaked Premium Beef Sausage Scrolls**, 900 g, all dates up to and including 27 08 04; **Unbaked Sausage Rolls**, 1 kg, all dates up to and including 10 09 04 and **Unbaked Premium Beef Sausage Rolls**, 750 g, all dates up to and including 9 09 04.

The problem: The rolls and scrolls contain undeclared soy protein, which may pose problems for those with an allergy or intolerance.

What to do: If you have a soy protein allergy or intolerance, don't eat them. Return them to the place of purchase for a refund, or call (07) 5541 3042 for more information.

FOOD: Barilla Australia has recalled **Barilla Arabbiata pasta sauce**, 400 g jar, use by March 05, and **Barilla Pesto Calabrese**, 190 g jar, use by October 04. The recall applies to products purchased in or before September 2003.

The problem: The products unintentionally contain Sudan 1, an additive that's not permitted in Australia.

What to do: Don't eat either sauce. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund, or call 1800 007 833 for more information.

FOOD: Natures Selection Foods has recalled **Naytura Fruit and Nut Snack Food**, 250 g packet, all best-before dates up to and including 23 May 04, and distributed by Woolworths.

The problem: The product contains undeclared milk and soy protein that may pose problems to anyone with an allergy or intolerance to milk or soy protein.

What to do: Don't eat it if you have a soy or milk protein allergy or intolerance. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund, or call (02) 8822 0600 for more information.

FOOD: National Foods has recalled **Pura UHT whole (full-cream) milk**, 1 L, in a blue slimline brick pack with

a use-by date of 1st May 2004, and purchased from supermarkets in WA.

The problem: The milk may be contaminated with a cleaning solution that gives it a brownish colour and possibly a strong odour.

What to do: Don't drink the milk. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund, or call 1800 653 303 for more information.

WINE: Southcorp has recalled **Rosemount Estate Semillon Sauvignon Blanc**, 750 mL, lot code L3120. The lot code can be found next to the barcode on the back label of the bottle.

The problem: The neck of some bottles may break upon opening due to a manufacturing fault.

What to do: Don't try to open the bottle. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund or call 1300 651 650 for more information.

TOY: Golf Trading has recalled a toy **Plastic Musical Instruments Set**, consisting of a toy tambourine, toy guitar and toy trumpet, sold in discount stores in NSW and Victoria between October 2002 and September 2003.

The problem: It doesn't meet the Australian Toy Standard due to the danger of small parts breaking off and posing a choking hazard to young children.

What to do: Store it out of the reach of children. Return the set to the place of purchase for a refund, or for more information call (02) 9764 2615.

AEROSOL PERFUME: Sara Lee Holdings has recalled **Ambi Pur 100 mL glass bottle aerosol instant perfume**, in rainforest, cashmere and tenderesse fragrances.

The problem: If dropped, the glass may break, and the protective PVC coating may fail to prevent the release of glass under pressure.

What to do: Remove the silver cap and carefully wrap the glass bottle aerosol in newspaper and dispose of it. For a coupon refund, return the silver cap to Sara Lee Household & Body Care

(Australia), PO Box 50, Clayton MDC 3169. For more information call 1800 066 376.

CANDLE: Bonnet Imports has recalled a **polyresin frog figurine with candle**, item number 5633.

The problem: The candle sold with the frog figurine has an unacceptable amount of lead in the wax.

What to do: Either replace the candle or return the product to the place of purchase for a refund. For more information call (02) 9531 8377 or email bonnae@bigpond.com.

PHARMACEUTICAL: Australian Pharmaceutical Industries has recalled **Bioglan Bio Superdophilus Tablets**, batch number 1809-3.

The problem: They were subject to recall due to their manufacture by Pan Pharmaceuticals, but have been resupplied to the ACT in error.

What to do: Return them to the place of purchase for a refund.

MOTORCYCLE: Honda Australia Motorcycle and Power Equipment has recalled **Honda GL 1800 motorcycles (Goldwing)**, 2002-03 models in the VIN range 1HFSC47U*3A200001 to 1HFSC47U*3A200040.

The problem: The mainframe stay may crack at the point where the main stand attaches to the frame.

What to do: Contact your nearest Honda dealer to arrange an inspection.

VEHICLE: Kawasaki Motors has recalled **Kawasaki All Terrain Vehicle**, models KVF300A/B and KVF400A/B/C/D, imported into Australia from January 1997 to December 2000.

The problem: The ball joint could fall off the knuckle, causing loss of control of the vehicle.

What to do: Contact your nearest Kawasaki dealer to arrange an inspection.

CAR: Vehicle Distributors Australia has recalled **Renault Laguna vehicles**,

VIN ranges VF1BG000A20607667 to VF1BG000A20612981, VF1BG000520607668 to VF1BG000525948956 and VF1KG000A20608656 to VF1KG000A20612487.

The problem: Some injection computers may be subject to irregular programming, which may result in unintended engine acceleration or temporarily high idling speed.

What to do: Contact an authorised Renault dealer for inspection and free repair if necessary. In the interim it's recommended you drive the vehicle with caution and avoid abrupt use of the throttle.

CAR: Mitsubishi has recalled **Mitsubishi WA Starwagon**, built between October 4, 2002, and June 20, 2003. VIN ranges JMFNEP4W2A000354 to JMFNEP4W2A000387 and JMFNEP4W3A000201 to JMFNEP4W3A000471.

The problem: The seatbelt retractor of the two-point seatbelt on the second-row seat immediately behind the driver may fail to properly restrain the wearer in the event of an accident.

What to do: Don't allow anyone to use that seating position until the affected part has been replaced. Contact your nearest Mitsubishi dealer to arrange for replacement.

1 FREE ISSUE

and a tips booklet when you subscribe to *Computer CHOICE*

Want more out of your computer?

If you'd like to improve on what you already know or just understand more about computers and how to use them, *Computer CHOICE* can help.

Learn how to solve your computer problems with our practical tutorials and Q&A section, plus get the latest computer news, handy tips and independent test results.

Delivered to your door every two months, it's the perfect reference guide for your home or office.

In your FREE issue:

- Laptop buying guide — what to look for and how to get a good deal.
- CD reliability — how durable are home-burned CDs and what can you do to ensure they last?
- DVD burners — check out our test of eight.
- Online price survey — we compare the cost of internet shopping with retail stores.



Subscribe and we'll send you a handy computer tips and shortcuts booklet, full of useful keyboard shortcuts and key reference information.

Computer CHOICE Order Form

Personal subscription

1 year (6 issues) ☐ \$41.80 2 years (12 issues) ☐ \$79.20
☐ \$37.40* ☐ \$70.40*

Professional/institution

1 year (6 issues) ☐ \$66.00 2 years (12 issues) ☐ \$123.00

* If you subscribe to CHOICE or another of our publications.

Delivery details

Mr/Ms/Mrs/Miss

Address

Postcode

Phone (daytime) Subscriber no.

(If applicable, it's on the address label that came with this magazine)

Payment details

INS/0312

☐ Please debit the selected credit card for \$.....

☐ Bankcard ☐ Mastercard ☐ Visa

☐ Amex ☐ Diners Club Expiry date/...../.....

Card no.

Name of cardholder

Signature Date/...../.....

OR

☐ Enclosed is a cheque/money order for \$.....
(payable to the Australian Consumers' Association)

MAIL TO: Australian Consumers' Association, Reply Paid 63261, Marrickville NSW 2204

PHONE: 1800 069 552 8.30 am–5 pm Mon–Fri EST and quote INS0312 (please have credit card details handy)

FAX: (02) 9577 3355 ACN 000 281 925 ABN 35 799 246 568 This form may be used as a tax invoice.

Published by the Australian Consumers' Association

CONTACT US

WRITE to us at CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204.

PHONE us on (02) 9577 3399.

FAX us on (02) 9577 3377.

EMAIL us at ausconsumer@choice.com.au

YOUR LETTERS

We welcome the letters you send us — please always include a daytime telephone number so we can contact you quickly if we want to follow up your letter. We're sorry we can't answer every letter we receive, but we do use them in our research. Thanks for taking the time to keep in touch.

Subscribe to CHOICE

Personal subscriptions: one year \$66, two years \$123.

Companies/institutions: one year \$105, two years \$200.

For subscription and renewal enquiries only, call 1800 069 552.

CHOICEExtra

The free website exclusive to CHOICE magazine personal subscribers: you'll find a four-year index with links to many articles online, plus extra information for some topics and access to our 'compare-a-product' feature for some products and services. See page 3 for how to register and log in.

CHOICE ONLINE

Personal CHOICE subscribers can have a discounted subscription to www.choice.com.au for just \$750 per quarter — go to CHOICEExtra and follow the prompts. If you currently have free access for 12 months, this will continue until that time is up, after which the discounted subscription will be available.



Call 1300 360 655

and let us shop for you

All you need is the model name and number you want to buy, the price you want to beat, and your CHOICE subscriber number (from the mailing label with the magazine). CHOICE Shopper is available to personal subscribers only.

CONTENT: General Manager Norm Crothers.

CHOICE Editor: Jane Mackenzie.

Writers/Journalists this issue: Birgit Baader, Karina Bray, Luisa Bustos, Alan Dooley, Martyn Goddard, Michael Hohl, Kim Laurie, David Lovejoy, Liz Munn, David Oakenfull.

Computer CHOICE: Editor Georgina Swan. **Deputy Editor/Journalist:** Luisa Bustos.

CHOICE BOOKS: Publisher Richard Smart. **Editor:** Colette Batha. **Editorial, distribution, marketing and online co-ordinator:** Tracey McTeane.

CHOICE ONLINE: Manager Linda Magee. **Deputy:** Chris Ruggles. **Webmaster:** Megan Turner. Glenn Mason. **Content generation:** Zara Baxter, Alan Dooley, Michael Hohl, Kim Laurie, Uta Mihm, Andrew Mogg, Liz Munn, David Oakenfull, Jackie Pearson, Bill Psiroukis, Marla Psiroukis, Chris Ruggles, Joel Thompson, Rosemary Thorburn.

RESEARCH AND TEST CENTRE: Manager John Ashes. **Laboratory manager:** Klaus Neuscheler. Antonio Bonacru, Brian Champion, Geoff Day, Peter Horvath, Mohamed Jawahir, Dilek Kozan, Fiona Neil, Neil Patterson, Ben Romberg, Benjamin Rossetto, Petr Valouch. **Buying:** Dorothy Kneale, Kate Murdoch. **Research:** Christine Shaday, Joe Sydney.

COMMUNITY: General Manager Mary Harris. **Community research:** Belinda Chu, Alison Keady, Ann Munroe, Melanie Stopic. **Marketing co-ordinator:** Kellie Thompson.

CONSUMER SERVICES: Manager Bill Stuart. **Team leader:** Lizzie Ball. Silvana Ristevska, Matthew Steen, Elke Strecker, Sarah Wilson.

QUALITY AND IT SYSTEMS: General Manager Barbara Manchester. **Subscriptions:** Manager Bill Stuart. **Supermarket:** Nootaya Hwang. **Co-ordinator:** Thelma Bracken. Lynda-Maree Colombo, Fiona Pollard. **IT:** Manager Stephen Macdonald. **Charles J. Quality control:** Manager Pam Gardiner. **Verifiers:** Sharon Cauda, Corinna Horrobin, Elizabeth Hurt, Catherine Lee, Lawson Lobb, Karen Palmer.

POLICY AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS: Charles Britton, Martyn Goddard, Clare Hughes, Catherine Wolthuisen.

CONSUMING INTEREST: Editor Peter Cerehse.

SENIOR MEDIA CO-ORDINATOR: Gail Kennedy.

The Australian Consumers' Association is a non-profit, non-party-political organisation, established in 1959 to provide consumers with information and advice on goods, services, health and personal finances, and to help maintain and enhance their quality of life. It's a Council member of Consumers International.

We are completely independent. Our income is derived solely from the sale of CHOICE and our other publications and products. All the products we subject to full testing and comparison are bought by us in the marketplace; sometimes to get the latest model we may buy directly from a manufacturer where we can select a random sample. We never accept gifts from manufacturers or retailers; we sometimes borrow samples, especially of new products, for quick reviews or pre-evaluation before we can buy in the marketplace. We are not beholden to any commercial, government or union interests, and we don't accept advertising, paid or unpaid.

We test and rate products and services. Our ratings are usually based on quality without regard to price, and are derived from lab tests, expert judgments and reader surveys. If a product is high in quality and relatively low in price, we deem it a **Best Buy**. A rating applies only to the brand and model tested, not to other models sold under the same brand name, unless so noted. Financial information in CHOICE is of a general nature, and is not intended to be advice on individual investments.

We represent and act in consumers' interests. We lobby and campaign on behalf of consumers to promote their rights, to influence government policy, and to ensure consumer issues have a high profile in the public arena.

Membership. Subscribers can become voting members of the Consumers' Association on application. Voting membership costs \$95.70 for a year, which covers your subscription to CHOICE with free access to CHOICE Online and a further subscription to our policy and campaigning magazine, *Consuming Interest*.

No commercial use policy. Our ratings and reports may not be used in advertising or for any other commercial purpose. The Consumers' Association will take all steps open to it to prevent commercial use of its materials, its name, and the name of CHOICE or its other publications and products. Please report any apparent violation to the Consumers' Association, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204; phone (02) 9577 3399; fax (02) 9577 3355; email ausconsumer@choice.com.au.

Permissions. Reproduction of CHOICE, CHOICE Books and other CHOICE publications, in whole or in part, is forbidden without prior written permission (and is never permitted for commercial purposes). Address requests to CHOICE Consumer Services at the address above left.

Your privacy. We're committed to protecting your privacy, and abide by Australia's National Privacy Principles. We never sell or give our mailing lists to other organisations. If you'd like to read our privacy policy, it's on our website or we can send you a copy — see above left for how to contact us.

All literary and artistic works and compilations of information are the subject of Australian and international copyright © Australian Consumers' Association 2003. CHOICE™ is a trademark of the Australian Consumers' Association. All rights reserved.

PRODUCTION: Production manager Darrell Sly. **Art director:** Michelle Havenstein. **Senior designer:** Jacqui Frey. **Photographer/Graphics co-ordinator:** Tamara Graham. **Online production co-ordinator:** Amelia Meyer.

FINANCE AND PROPERTY: Manager Allan Johnston. **Accounts:** Jeannette Dwyer, Kang Zhu Ge, Sera Vunilola. **Administration:** Jeannette Porter. **Library:** Jane Wholahan. **Records management:** Shirley Colless.

TEST RESEARCH (NATA-accredited) provides independent, fee-for-service testing and research on consumer products, services and regulatory issues for other consumer organisations, governments and industry; under some conditions it undertakes public testing. Contact Jeannette Dwyer on (02) 9577 3327.

Marketing statistics by GfK Marketing Services. **Financial information** supplied by CanneX. **Services information** supplied by ASSIRT.

The Australian Consumers' Association is governed by an honorary Council elected by the voting members. For information about voting membership, contact CHOICE Consumer Information on (02) 9577 3399. Members of the Council give their time without reimbursement, and are not engaged as principals in industry, advertising or sales.

COUNCIL: Chair Chris Field BA, LLB (Hons). **Deputy Chair:** Debra Harker PhD. **Members:** Allan Barton AM, JP, MSC, PhD, FRACI, FNZIC; Robin Brown BA, Master of Public Policy; Tony Charge BA, Dip Lib, AFAM; Cynthia Cliff BSc (Hons), PhD, Dip Env Stud, Grad Dip Outdoor Ed, Grad Dip Bus Admin, MRACI, C Chem; Tim Dixon BSc (Hons), LLB; Dr Ken Harvey MB BS, FRCPA, MASM; Dianne Hill FCA, Phil Macdonald MRAHRM, Dip IR, Dip Lab Rel & the Law; Professor Ben Selinger FRACI, FARS, FRATSE; Joan Staples BA; John T D Wood BArch, FRAM. **The Association** is a not-for-profit company limited by guarantee. **ACN** 200 281 925. **ABN** 35 799 246 568. **Registered office:** 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204. **Telephone:** (02) 9577 3333. **Fax:** (02) 9577 3377. **Subscription enquiries:** (02) 9577 3399. **CHOICE Consumer Services:** (02) 9577 3399. email ausconsumer@choice.com.au. www.choice.com.au.

index

HOW TO USE THIS INDEX

Bold type indicates a test, survey or trial report, normal type indicates other articles.

* Indicates an update of a previous report, additions or corrections to reports, small follow-up items, letters or recalls. For space reasons, the index generally doesn't include Choice Cuts and other small pieces.

A ir conditioners, split-system	Oct	Energy retailers, changing	Jul, Sep*	Hoses, garden	Oct	R efrigerators — see Fridges	
Air quality, indoor	Sep	Enjo cleaning products	Aug	Hospital insurance	Jul	Retirement villages	Sep
Anti-aging creams	Mar	Espresso machines	Apr	Hospital, surviving	Oct		
B aby carriers	Mar, Jun*	Ethanol in petrol	May, Aug*	Hot water systems		S alad, prepacked	Dec
Backphones	Jul	Ethical super	Oct, Dec*	choosing	Oct	Selling your home, DIY	Nov
Baldness treatments	Jun, Dec*	Ethical manufacture	Jan/Feb, Jun, Oct*	gas instantaneous	Oct	Sheets	Jun
Banks, choc to switch	Apr			House and contents insurance	Jun	Solardom oven (LG)	Nov
Bar fridges	Jun	F ast food	Apr, Jun*	I ndex, four-year	Jun	Soup, pumpkin	Jul
Bathroom cleaners	Nov	Financial		Indoor air quality	Sep	Soy	Jun
Bed sheets	Jun	credit cards	Dec	Induction cooktops	Aug	Soy milk maker	Jun
Beer, premium	Sep	ethical super	Oct, Dec*	Insurance		Sparkling wine and champagne	Dec
Biscuits, choc chip	Nov	home loan packages	Mar	ancillary health	Aug	Steam oven (Brandt)	Nov
Brandt steam oven	Nov	planners	Jan/Feb, Apr*, May*	hospital	Jul	Strollers, layback	Aug
Bread	Jan/Feb	saving for education	May	house and contents	Jun	Sunglasses	Aug, Oct*
Breakfast cereals	May	switching banks	Apr	travel	Mar, Apr*, Nov	Sunscreens	Nov
C amcorders, digital		F ood		Internet dial-up problems,		Supernaturation, ethical	Oct, Dec*
Cameras	Jan/Feb, Apr*, Dec	bread	Jan/Feb	fixing	Aug	Supermarket prices	Jul
compact and APS	Apr	breakfast cereals	May	Investment, ethical	Oct, Dec*	T ea, pesticide residues in	May
digital	Oct	choc chip biscuits	Nov	Irons, steam, expensive	Jan/Feb	Telephones — see Phones	
C ars		custard	Dec	J eans, ethical manufacture	Jan/Feb, Jun, Oct*	Television	
crash tests, ANCAP	Apr	diet controversies	Mar	Jan/Feb, Jun, Oct*		51 cm	Apr, Aug*
ethanol in petrol	May, Aug*	fast food	Apr, Jun*	Juicers	Dec	68 cm	Nov
reader reviews	Jan/Feb, Aug	healthy eating guidelines	Mar	K nee-highs	Sep	Toothbrushes	Sep
repair costs	Mar	peanut butter	Jun	L abelling, food, percentage	Aug	Travel insurance	Mar, Apr*, Nov
tyres	May	percentage labelling	Aug	Laser printers, b&w	Apr	Tyres	May
used car safety	Sep	pizza	Oct	Laundry detergents	Jan/Feb	V acuum cleaners, cheap	Jul
CDMA mobile phones	Nov	potato chips, wedges, shapes	Sep	Lawnmowers/mulchers, petrol	Dec	Video cameras, digital	Jan/Feb, Apr*, Dec
Champagne and sparkling wine	Dec	pumpkin soup	Jul	Layback strollers	Nov	W ashing machines	Mar, Sep, Nov*
Child/baby concerns		salad, prepacked	Dec	LG Solardom oven	Aug	Washing-up liquids	Apr
baby carriers	Mar, Jun*	soy	Jun	M anufacture, ethical	Jan/Feb, Jun, Oct*	Water filters	Mar, May*
cots, portable	May	tea, pesticide residues in	May	Microfibre cleaning cloths	Aug	Water heaters	
high chairs	Oct	F ridges		Mobile phones	Nov	choosing	Oct
layback strollers	Aug	portable	Dec	CDMA	Jul	gas instantaneous	Oct
saving for education	May	side-by-side	Nov	GSM	Apr	Wine, sparkling and champagne	Dec
Chips, potato	Sep	small (no freezer)	Jun	Moisturisers	Jul	Wrinkle creams	Mar
Choc chip biscuits	Nov	bigger than 450 L	May	Money — see Banks, Financial			
Cleaners		G arden		Monitors, computer, buying guide	May		
bathroom	Nov	hoses	Oct	Mortgages, packaged	Mar		
Enjo products	Aug	lawnmowers/mulchers, petrol	Dec	Mulcher mowers, petrol	Dec		
microfibre cloths	Aug	G as and electricity retailers,	Jul, Sep*	O ven			
oven	Apr	changing		Brandt, steam	Nov		
Coffee (espresso) machines		Gas instantaneous water	Oct	cleaners	May		
Computer monitors,	May	heaters	Jul	LG Solardom	Nov		
buying guide	May	Grills, 'health'	Jul	P eanut butter	Jun		
Convection heaters, electric	Apr	H air, baldness treatments	Jun, Dec*	Percentage labelling of food	Aug		
Cooktops, induction	Aug	Hay fever treatments	Oct	Pesticide residues in tea	May		
Cordless phones	Apr	Headphones	Jul	Petrol, ethanol in	May, Aug*		
Corporate social responsibility	Jan/Feb, Jun, Oct*	Health		Phones, cordless	Apr		
Cots, portable	May	ancillary insurance	Aug	Phones, mobile — see Mobile			
Credit cards, top 10 and	Dec	echinacea	Nov	phones	Oct		
buying guide	Dec	hay fever treatments	Oct	Pizza	May		
Custard	Dec	healthy eating guidelines	Mar	Portable cots	Dec		
D etergents, laundry	Jan/Feb	hospital insurance	Jul	Portable fridges	Sep		
Diet controversies	Mar	hospital, surviving	Oct	Potato chips, wedges, shapes	Sep		
Digital camcorders	Jan/Feb, Apr*, Dec	HRT	Jan/Feb	Premium beer	Sep		
Digital cameras	Oct	prostheses costs	Dec	Printers, laser, b&w	Apr		
Dishwashing liquids	Apr	soy	Jun	Prostheses, costs	Dec		
DIY home sales	Nov	sunscreens	Nov	Pumpkin soup	Jul		
Duvets, buying guide	Dec	system, what's wrong?	Jul				
DVD players	May	Heaters, electric convection	Apr				
E chinacea	Nov	High chairs	Oct				
Education, saving for your	May	Home loan packages	Mar				
child's		Home, selling, DIY	Nov				
		Hormone replacement therapy	Jan/Feb				
		(HRT)					

HELP SUPPORT CHOICE



The Australian Consumers' Association is completely funded by our subscribers, book purchasers and other customers. We don't receive ongoing funding from government or any commercial source. Your donation or bequest to ACA will assist our work of informing and representing Australian consumers. To make a contribution or receive an information pack, call Lizzie (above) on 1800 069 552 or email us at ausconsumer@choice.com.au.

YOU'LL NEVER GUESS WHAT MR DONUT MAKES

Pies, Pasties, Pastries, Buns, Cakes, Croissants,
Quiches, Muffins, Sausage Rolls, Slices
and the very best Donuts.

Makers of Healthy Fresh Foods

So where are the healthy foods?

With the possible exception of buns, describing these generally high-fat/high-sugar foods as "healthy" is quite a leap of the imagination.



"PANDORA'S BOX" HUONVILLE OFFERS INVITED

Behind these cedar doors are treasures unseen from the outside. High raked pine ceilings, all rooms extra large, up to 10 bedrooms, 2 enormous lounge/dining rooms, large indoor and outdoor entertainment areas, 2 separate

family dining kitchens, 4 large family bathrooms, interior plaster, double coach brick and exterior solid sandstone. Inspection a must!!

BUYER BEWARE

Please ... if you're going to affect scholarship in the classics, get it right! Just in case there's anyone other than these real estate agents who doesn't know, Pandora's box contains not "treasures", but an assortment of human ills (and hope, presumably to help you deal with them). Hardly what you want in a house.

Preview 1,479 Food Remedies for every condition



FREE for 14 Days

Want to make it as easy as possible for you to get started on the road to better health. That's why we've made it so easy for you to respond. Simply drop the free-trial card in the nearest post box.

We'll rush you a copy of **THE DOCTORS BOOK OF FOOD REMEDIES** to try **FREE** for 14 days.

During those 14 days, you can give the book a complete "test drive." Read it ... check it out ... try as many of the remedies as you want. Experience first-hand the difference they make in your life.

Then ... if you're not absolutely thrilled with the book and the results it brings you, simply return it and owe nothing.

And the bonus book **Doctors 100 All-time greatest Home Remedies** is yours as our "thank you gift" just for trying **THE DOCTORS BOOK OF FOOD REMEDIES!**



Bored sick?

Here's an offer to relieve your boredom *and* sickness. This book has 1479 food remedies for you to try for 14 days. At over 100 remedies every day, it'll certainly keep you busy!

LANZA



5 YEAR
QUALITY GUARANTEE

We are confident that you will be delighted with your new Lanza luggage. It has been manufactured to the highest specification under tight quality control systems and is covered by our three year quality guarantee.

They say time flies ...

Here's two years gone in the blink of an eye.



WHOSE BEST DEAL?

Given that it's cheaper to buy two 250 gram packets of butter (\$1.58) than one of 500 grams (\$1.89), only one of these labels can really claim to be "your best deal" — and it's not the one you'd usually expect.

HOW ABOUT A LITTLE HELP?

The Hard Word would like to thank all the readers who've responded with examples of outrageous ads, promotions and products. Thanks to J Oswald, A Apsitis, H McDonald, C Wood, H Rzesniowiecki and M French for their contributions to this month's Hard Word. Please keep them coming. The Hard Word book winner for this month's best entry is C Wood.

If you have any examples you think deserve to be on this page, send them to *The Hard Word*, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204, or email your suggestions to thehardword@choice.com.au.